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**Exploring Place: Further Education, Working Class Women
and a Foundation Degree**

Doctor of Education (EdD)

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(CREET)**

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‘Once you embrace the idea that you can change your world,
you begin looking for the tools with which to do so’

(Baumgardner and Richards, 2010, p. 295.).

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Abstract

In May 2010 a newly elected coalition government inherited a concern about widening access to higher education in the United Kingdom. As far as widening participation within higher education is concerned, research indications are that while overall participation has increased, the rate of participation from under-represented groups has remained at a consistently low level (UCAS 2012a, ESRC 2012).

My study is motivated by these disparities in participation rates and by a desire to critique the assumptions made within policy. I view widening participation policy as problematic in its negative portrayal of working class students as having low aspirations (Dearing 1997, DfES 2003a).

An interpretive method of enquiry was adopted to develop a qualitative case study approach. This drew on data gathered between 2011 and 2015. Eighteen semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with four women studying on a foundation degree.

Key documents including the *Robbins Report* (Robbins, 1963a), the *Dearing Report* (Dearing, 1997) and *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003c) were selected to discuss the assumptions that circulate in the government in order to explore how these might have shaped successive thinking. I suggest that there are implications for practice as attitudes towards education are shaped by factors which filter down from policy such as access and curriculum design.

Findings from my study suggest that working class women possess future aspirations, have some support mechanisms in place and in part study 'to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake' (Dearing, 1997, p. 72.) despite living multifaceted lives.

Fluctuating levels of self-esteem and issues of engrained gender roles and conflict as the women attempt to combine family life and study are also evident.

A move towards a transformative model of education where a more student-centred approach to curriculum design and delivery is developed is required. The long term benefits of such will remain unrealised as long as the economy remains the government's focal driver of societal change.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Thesis introduction

This chapter introduces my thesis. It establishes the focus and aims of my study and sets out the research questions. An explanation of my interest in the research topic on both a personal and professional level is then offered along with that of the women I interviewed. This contextualises my study and situates it within a broader perspective. The overall structure of my thesis with an outline of its content then follows.

1.2 Focus and aims of the study

My study focuses on a deprived town in the North West of England, the further education college within it and four working class women studying for the Foundation Degree in Children, Young People and their Services. For the purpose of this thesis the town and college will be referred to as Ramsbridge and Ramsbridge College respectively in order to provide some anonymity.

In May 2010 a coalition government was elected in the United Kingdom. This government inherited a concern about widening access to higher education which continues within policy debates. The broader issues about social mobility, equality and social justice that these debates raise remain. The stated goals of widening participation policy in the United Kingdom are to improve the access to higher education of under-represented groups.

My study focuses on widening participation within higher education and the assumptions, often explicit, made by the government about a particular under-represented group, working class students. A recurring theme in widening participation policy is that working class students have low aspirations (Dearing 1997, DfEE 1998a, DfES 2003a, DfES 2004a,

Francis 2006, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011a). My study is motivated by the disparities in participation rates between lower and higher socio-economic groups and by a desire to critique the assumptions underpinning policy that suggest students within these distinct groups approach studying in higher education differently.

The first aim of my study is to analyse the stories the women tell about their experiences of education and studying on the foundation degree. In doing this I can compare my interpretation of their stories with the assumptions suggested within widening participation policy. The assumptions that often underpin the low aspiration theme within the widening participation agenda are that as a homogenous group (Dearing, 1997, HEFCE, 2007) working class students are less likely to 'increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake' (Dearing, 1997, p. 72.) and lack the academic skills (European Commission 1993, DfES 2003b) and support structure (DfES, 2006b, Milburn 2010, SMCP, 2013) to enable them to study. These assumptions inform practice, where a different curriculum is needed for higher level vocational courses such as the foundation degree. Analysing the stories the women tell about their experiences of education will inform my view of how non-traditional students' experiences of higher education reflect and challenge assumptions that underpin aspects of the widening participation agenda.

The second aim of my study is to evaluate the impact of living in Ramsbridge and studying in Ramsbridge College on the women's experiences of education. In doing this I can determine whether the assumptions relating to location underpinning widening participation policy are justified or whether it simply assumes that location does not play any role.

The third aim of my study is to draw on the stories the women tell of their experiences of studying at Ramsbridge College and my own experience of teaching and learning to

challenge policy shaped practice. I will then propose how teaching and learning can be redesigned to better take account of some of the realities of working class life.

1.3 Research questions

My research questions were developed over four academic years as I conducted an ongoing literature review and collected data. Exploring the discourses within widening participation policy highlighted the salient assumptions in which working class students are positioned within higher education. I wanted to explore the stories of the women studying for a foundation degree in Ramsbridge College so I could draw my own conclusions about whether these assumptions are justified. I developed the following research questions in order to do this:

1. How do the women's experiences of education reflect and challenge the assumptions underpinning widening participation policy?
2. To what extent can the women's experiences of education be explained by place?
3. How can the women's experiences of education shape practice in a further education college?

It is important to define the term *place* in research question 2 in order to position the women within my study. Firstly, the term *place* is used in the self-evident context of geographical location, referring to Ramsbridge and Ramsbridge College where the women live and study. Secondly, the term *place* is used in the context of belonging and refers to the women studying as part of the 2011/2012 foundation degree cohort. This context implicates key aspects of my theoretical frame, particularly, and refers to the *community of practice* (Wenger 2008) *habitus* and *field* (Bourdieu 1990). Thirdly, the term *place* is used

in the context of *mindset* and refers to attitudes and beliefs the women hold about themselves, what they are capable of achieving and how they learn (Dweck, 2012).

To answer the research questions I established an understanding of the themes the women viewed as important, their perceptions of education and the impact of place. Having this understanding was vital to inform my interpretation of the assumptions underpinning widening participation policy and to gauge whether the assumptions I identified are justified. Some widening participation policies predate the introduction of the foundation degree but some appear more recently. Both needed to be examined in order for me to have an informed view.

Research informs understanding of ‘how and why people and organisations make decisions’ (ESRC, 2012, p. 44.). The intended impact of the conclusions and recommendations from my study is to inform the provision of higher education in further education with a particular focus on the foundation degree and inform how working class women can be better represented in the future. My study has both personal and professional relevance and is ‘applicable to real-life educational practice’ (Burgess et al, 2006, p. 4.).

1.4 My personal interest in the study

My personal interest in the study came from sharing some similarities with the women studying on the foundation degree. I see myself as having a working class background but I have made the decision to continue in education and to continue to study at undergraduate, Master’s and doctoral levels. I have also lived in one of the deprived wards within Ramsbridge and studied at Ramsbridge College as a teenager before working in schools and nurseries in the town.

These connections are important in helping me to make sense of both the women's stories and of my own. I need to explore why I had continued in education following compulsory schooling and had achieved some academic success while the women in my study had not. I recognise that this focus on my personal biography might help develop useful insights; at the same time I recognise the danger that this approach could make me less sympathetic on the grounds that *"if I could do it, then so could they"*.

1.5 My professional interest in the study

My professional interest in the study comes from the variety of roles I have within Ramsbridge College. In my role as lecturer, advanced learning coach, teaching staff coach and initial teacher training mentor and observer I am interested in supporting others understanding of pedagogy and in improving teaching and learning. These roles complement each other and enable me to have a holistic view of teaching and learning within Ramsbridge College.

My interest in the study also comes from my role as programme leader for the foundation degree being studied by the women. From providing initial advice and guidance at interview through to teaching and providing pastoral care I come to know my students well. I am intrigued by the stories that the women tell about the paths that have led them to be studying for the foundation degree at Ramsbridge College and what they aim to achieve by it.

Two aspects of widening participation which are important to me intersect in this study. These are first, the delivery of foundation degrees within further education colleges and initiatives that aim to encourage the participation of under-represented groups such as working class women. I view education as a right but recognise that it is a practice which is

currently determined by class, gender or place. My concern is that when education is so determined it cannot be viewed as an equal right. The aspect of higher education I have chosen to study is under-researched. Such research as exists includes little done 'from the inside'. This study is a contribution to addressing these deficiencies which aims to encourage the better representation of working class women in future literature and practice.

1.6 The women's interest in my study

During the participant selection process I made it clear to the women that involvement in my research would not impact on their current or future study on the foundation degree (see appendix 8) and there would be no offer of recompense (Braun and Clarke, 2013). I was interested in the reasons why the women had volunteered to participate in my research. These women live complex and often quite difficult lives and being interviewed ran the risk of adding to already existing demands. The motives of some participants and their willingness to be involved in research will always raise questions of narcissism, yet any concerns I may have had about self-absorption or vanity were quickly dispelled (Etherington, 2004, p. 227.). The women recognised that in gaining insight into their lives I would have a better understanding of the impact it could have on their foundation degree experience:

"you've got to see a side of me that you wouldn't normally see if you were just tutoring me...you can look at my work sometimes and think, umh, maybe that wasn't such a good piece of work but maybe there are reasons" (AI2P13L19).

Assumptions underpinning widening participation policy tend to view non-traditional students such as working class women as a homogeneous group (HEFCE, 2007). The focus of my study was to explore the experiences of women studying for a foundation degree in Ramsbridge College in order to gauge whether the assumptions I identified in

some widening participation policy literature was justified. This aim was reinforced by the reasons given by the women for participating in my study where sharing experiences highlights individual differences within the *community of practice* of the foundation degree (Wenger 2008):

“we are people on a foundation degree who come from such different places...the age, ability, experience. I guess if you get a snapshot of different people’s perspectives it helps to paint an overall picture” (BI4P6L21).

Recognising difference and challenging assumptions is at the heart of my study. How I represent the women within my thesis is important as I do not want to be patronising. The following section outlines the structure of the remainder of my thesis.

1.7 Thesis structure

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the research context. It begins by charting the growth and decline of Ramsbridge and situating it within a working class community. The origins of Ramsbridge College and its links to the needs of male dominated industry are presented in order to outline how the role of the college altered in response to the changing needs of the community and its current role with respect to the ongoing regeneration of the town. The four women and the particular foundation degree they are studying are then introduced.

Chapter 3 presents a review of the literature on which my study is based. An understanding of a diverse literature is required due to the intricate nature of its context. It explores widening participation policy and academic literature relating to the participation of non-traditional groups within higher education. Through this literature review I explore the evolution of widening participation policy in relation to social class and gender. I selected as key documents the *Robbins Report* (Robbins, 1963a), the *Dearing Report*

(Dearing, 1997) and *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003c). These three are chosen because each one represents an era within widening participation policy, I use these documents to explore whether they reveal assumptions that are consistent despite shifts in language and whether these assumptions have continued to shape policy over a fifty year period.

Chapter 4 provides a rationale for the research methodology. Examination of methodological literature assured me that a small scale, qualitative approach to my study was the most appropriate in order to depict the unique characteristics of ‘one case in depth’ (Bartlett and Burton, 2007, p. 47.). Biographical accounts and semi-structured interviews were used to capture the women’s stories. Three focus group sessions were also conducted with a further six women from the same cohort to authenticate some of the perspectives within the stories the four women told.

Chapter 5 provides analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the women’s stories. It is presented under the broad themes of *future aspiration*, *fair access* and *support structures*. These themes relate to the topics that the women viewed as important and to the assumptions that underpin widening participation policy explored in chapter 3. Analysis and interpretation of the data informs my understanding of the aspiration levels working class women can have and the implications of higher education provision within further education.

Chapter 6 presents conclusions and recommendations from my study. This final chapter begins by addressing each research question. Discussion on the relationship between data gathered and the literature reviewed then enables conclusions to be drawn. These are supported by reflections made on other areas within the study such as methodology and

topics for future study. Chapter 6 concludes by reflecting on the process of completing the thesis and what this means to me both personally and as a professional.

1.8 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has introduced my thesis. It establishes the focus and aims of my study and sets out the research questions. The explanation of my personal and professional interest in the research topic has begun to contextualise my study and situate it within a broader perspective. As a female researcher from a working class background teaching on foundation degrees in a further education college I am in a privileged position to be able to interpret the stories that these women tell.

I have set out the overall structure of my thesis in this chapter. The next chapter will provide an overview of the research context of Ramsbridge, Ramsbridge College, the foundation degree and the women within which my study is situated.

Chapter 2: Overview of the research context

2.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter presents an overview of the research context. It provides a context to place, further education, the foundation degree and the women. This is important as it positions the women within my study and helps to justify my research focus.

2.2 Ramsbridge town

Ramsbridge is a working class, industrial town. It is situated on the end of a peninsula in the North West of England. It grew from ‘unremarkable village to Victorian boomtown’ with the arrival of the railway in 1846 (Trecatheric, 1992, p. 1.). Large numbers of men came from around the country for the next hundred years to work in the iron and steel works and later the shipyard. Donna’s great grandparents travelled from the “*tin mines in Cornwall*” (DI2P5L42) to Ramsbridge to mine ore for the iron works. This is a story each of the women in my study can relate to as their families moved to Ramsbridge for work. This is also the case for my maternal ancestors.

Ramsbridge is an example of a ‘classic Victorian mushroom town’ (Trecatheric, 1992, p. 13.) as the population increased rapidly by the thousands each year (see appendix 1 and 2). This immediate increase is most noticeable when comparing statistics on population from two specific consecutive census years. In the 1851 census the population of Ramsbridge was recorded as 4,684 yet by the next census in 1861 the population had grown to 22,563 (GBHGIS, 2013).

Houses were quickly built by the leading industries of the railway and the iron and steel works to accommodate the workers and their families (Kellett, 1990). Ramsbridge was one

of the first planned towns in Britain (Pollard, 1954) but as the population grew so quickly it could not be built by 'following one master blueprint' (Trecatheric, 1992, p. 13.). This resulted in an unusually high percentage of terraced housing being built quickly in concentric rings. A lot of this housing remains and is in poor condition. Two of the women were living within this area of the town at the beginning of my study. Chloe still rents a house here which she refers to as "*the ghetto*" (CI2P4L26).

When the men moved to Rambridge in the mid nineteenth and twentieth century to find work they brought their wives and children with them. The women worked within the home fitting their lives around the needs of their family (Roberts 1984). All four of the women in this study were familiar with this lifestyle. Donna's mother fitted employment such as cleaning and kitchen work around school hours "*so she was at home*" (DI2P5L24) with the family. Women's paid work tended to be viewed as a temporary strategy coming in to force when families encountered financial difficulties (Pedersen, 1993). This tended to be viewed by the working class community as the man not being able to provide for his family. This reflected 'badly' on the man's status as breadwinner (Roberts 1984, p. 137.). The man as the head of the family tended to be viewed as dominant yet in bearing the responsibility of managing earnings and upholding the 'family's status in the eyes of the community' (Pedersen, 1993, p. 39.) it was the women who ran the household. Roberts (1984), interviewing working class women growing up in three local towns including Ramsbridge between 1890 and 1940 saw 'no evidence to suggest' this point of view was challenged (Roberts 1984, p. 137.). Beth's mother "*went with anything just to keep the peace*" (BI1P4L14). This suggests that there were clear gendered roles for both the women and the men in the town. The family was dependent on the women and although this tied the women to the family, dependency brought with it positive levels of self-esteem and pride (Purvis, 1995, p. 64.). This shows that there were on-going conflicts between the

sources from which the women gained their self-esteem and the price they had to pay. In this case it was being dependent on a male bread winner.

The population and reputation of Ramsbridge continued to grow as it gained international ship building contracts that by the end of the 1980s provided a 'period of rare economic optimism' (Trecatheric 1992, p. 75.). The workforce of the shipyard grew from '9,500 in 1983 to a peak of 14,000' in 1990 (Dock Museum, 2015). It dominated the local economy with success relying on orders from the Royal Navy shipbuilding programme. By 1990 the shipyard employed more than 14,000 people and directly or indirectly supported a 'third of all employment in the area' (Ramsbridge Partnership, 2007, p. 3.). Up until the 1990s male school leavers could rely on getting a job for life in the yard (Dock Museum, 2015). Often both teenagers and parents did not consider any other career options available. Ramsbridge was a confident town, built by men and dominated by male industry. For both the women and the men in the town there were clear gendered roles.

A combination of factors contributed to the domination of one industry and this in turn led to the decline of Ramsbridge. The shipyard was privatised in 1986 when it employed almost half of the working population of the town (Trecatheric, 1992). The workers took industrial action over the introduction of flexible holidays brought in by the new management to replace the traditional shipyard fortnight. This had a financial impact on the community and the small businesses within it. The closure of the steel works due to the recession in 1983 and the impact of the ending of the Cold War meant the shipyard received fewer orders and the number of people unemployed in the town increased. Between 1990 and 1995 '13,000' jobs were lost 'representing 30 per cent' of all employment in the town (Ramsbridge partnership, 2007, p. 3.). The men wanted to work and there was a genuine concern within Ramsbridge of 'what will the lads do on Monday?' (Trecatheric, 1992, p. 75.). At the peak of the 1980s recession three million jobs were lost

in the United Kingdom (Seager and Elliott, 2009). By 1984 unemployment had increased from '5.9 per cent to 12 per cent' (Schifferes, 2009, p. 1.). Male dominated jobs in the North were particularly hard hit by industrial restructuring (Schifferes, 2009, p. 1.). In the mid 1990s unemployment was high and Ramsbridge fell into decline. The issues relating to deprivation within the town were brought on by economic downturn. This resulted in the town having a higher unemployment rate than the United Kingdom average. The unemployment rate in Ramsbridge was 2.6 per cent, one full per cent point above the county average of 1.6 per cent and over a quarter per cent point above the United Kingdom average of 2.3 per cent and ranking as the '29th most deprived local authority' in England (Ramsbridge Partnership, 2007, p. 11.). By 2000 Ramsbridge shipyard only employed between 3,000 and 4,000 workers (Dock Museum, 2015). The variation in employment figures as a result of fluctuating contract needs meant that work was not regular. This served to compound the uncertainty for the future felt in the town. Beth remembers her brother's friends talking about whether "*there'd be jobs by the time they left school*" (BI1P11L40).

Six of the eight wards that make up Ramsbridge are classed as deprived. The term *deprivation* covers a 'broad range of issues and refers to unmet needs caused by a lack of resources of all kinds' (DCLG, 2010, p. 1.) such as location, employment and education (see appendix 14). Within Ramsbridge's six most deprived wards there are more unemployed men than women. In April 2013 there were 4.7 per cent of men and 2.1 per cent of women in the town were unemployed (ONS, 2013b, p. 1.). A large number of people within the town are unemployed due to poor health, notably circulatory disease, drug misuse and mental ill health. In 2012 approximately 6.4 per cent of the population in Ramsbridge aged sixteen and over were unemployed due to ill health compared to approximately 4.1 per cent in the county (CO, 2012). There are more men claiming incapacity/severe disablement allowance than women (see appendix 3). This continues to

rise. In both my main study and in focus group 2, half of the eight women involved had a husband/partner who did not work due to ill health. I need to be cautious about the potential implications but this may be an indication that in some working class communities it is more acceptable for a man to be unable to work as a result of sickness than unemployment. In turn this can make it more acceptable for women to work outside the household as a result of male physical incapacity being less stigmatising for traditional breadwinners than being unable to work. As a result of family dependence women are less likely to neglect the role of wife, mother and breadwinner when faced with illness. In this situation medical attention may not be sought until a 'crisis' has been reached by the women (Purvis, 1995, p. 63.) and "*it has got to a point where it has to stop, something has to give*" (FG1P3L40).

Although the population of the North West 'grew between 2001 and 2011' the population of Ramsbridge declined by '4.0 per cent' (ONS, 2011, p. 15.) (see appendix 4). These figures are most likely the result of 'more deaths and fewer births' (ONS, 2011, p. 14.). The population of seven of the nine regions in England increased between 1991 and 2001 compared to the North East and North which 'both decreased slightly from 1981 to 2001' (ONS 2011, p. 14.). Differences in growth rates between local authorities could be attributed to families moving out of particular area to find work in another. In 2012 there was a decrease of more than eighteen per cent in the under fourteen year old population and seventeen per cent in the thirty to forty four year old population (Townsend and Westcott, 2012, p. 25.). Previously those accessing higher education tended to do so out of town and most did not 'come back' (Townsend and Westcott, 2012, p. 25.). In this way new skills were not fed back in to Ramsbridge. This highlighted a need to provide a wider range of higher education in Ramsbridge not only to encourage people to come to study and work but also to encourage locals to stay.

The regeneration of Ramsbridge began in 1990 with the redevelopment of the town centre. *Love Ramsbridge* and *Marina Village* are two of a number of regeneration programmes. More recently a £300 million upgrade for the town's submarine yard due to begin in 2015 has been announced (Tovey, 2014). Ramsbridge College is an important part of the community. Strategic aim number 4 of the college mission statement is 'to be at the heart of the economic and social regeneration' of the town (see appendix 10).

2.3 Ramsbridge College

Despite being relatively small in national terms, Ramsbridge College nevertheless is the largest education and training establishment in the South of the county (ChooseRamsbridge, 2016). In 2014 it had approximately 2,500 students including more than 1,000 full-time students, 700 apprentices and 550 higher education students (Ramsbridge College, 2015). At 500 students, those on day release from the shipyard are the single largest group of students studying at Ramsbridge College. This indicates that heavy industry remains at the heart of the town and that training for employment remains a crucial aspect of provision.

Ramsbridge College is situated in a deprived area of the town and is some forty miles away from the nearest university. It was one of only thirteen colleges across the country to be awarded funding for a new build in 2012 to the value of £44 million. Arguably, this suggests that funders see the town as having the potential to benefit from investment in education. More cynical voices might suggest that this is a sign of a long standing shortfall in such funding.

Educational provision in Ramsbridge was 'almost negligible' prior to the arrival of the railway in 1846 (Kellett, 1990, p. 65.). Of the 6,490 people married in Ramsbridge in 1870

‘more than a quarter’, (1,756) were illiterate (Marshall, 1958, p. 10.) with more women than men signing the register with a mark rather than a signature. The illiterate women were reliant on the knowledge their more literate husbands had. This alone suggests that there was a distinct imbalance in how the benefits of education were distributed and suggests that women would find it harder to take advantage of any opportunities that education might offer.

Widening participation within education emerged in reaction to the desire to control the ‘new urban’ working classes and support the ‘social and political aspirations’ of the new middle classes (Ball, 2008, p. 56.). Industrialisation and the development of trade saw the mass migration of the working classes in to towns and cities. This economic shift tended to intensify social problems relating to health, crime, juvenile delinquency and ‘changing kinship structures’ (Ball, 2008, p. 56.). The government saw this as a threat to political stability. In this way those with a working class background tended to be viewed as a homogeneous group. Although the education of the working classes was perceived as a panacea for society’s ills it carried a risk. Knowledge brings power. In gaining access to knowledge the working classes may start to have aspirations beyond societies’ expectations (Chitty, 2009). The aim to raise levels of participation in education from those from working class backgrounds in Ramsbridge can be traced back to 1877. The middle class men who brought the railway to Ramsbridge were instrumental in the development of the town’s industry, housing and education (Kellett, 1990). Writing in the foreword of the Education Week Handbook John Whinnerah sets out the aim of an education system in Ramsbridge that will develop every boy and girl both mentally and physically (Education Committee 1925). Whinnerah hints at supporting widening participation and the notion that everyone could benefit from an education through the phrase ‘every boy and girl who has abilities’ (Education Committee, 1925, p. 11.). This avoids the issue of a universal education by suggesting that those with ability should have the same opportunity to

education. In the handbook going on to outline a different education system for girls and boys the assumption that different social classes and genders required different types of education is reinforced.

The origins of Ramsbridge College can be traced back to 1877. The private School of Art and Science was based in one room of a function room in the town centre. This was originally used for leisure activities for the middle-classes. Lectures were presented to the public and always well attended by both a middle and working class audience. The average lecture attendance was 1,281. In 1891 a lecture on the earth's history exceeded usual figures with a total of 1,539 people in attendance (Kellett, 1990, p. 67.). I need to be careful not to suggest that people who could be described as working class in the nineteenth century were interested in education in the same way as working class people in the twenty first century. I suggest instead that the members of the audience would not have wasted their money on something they were not interested in and that the attendance of such lectures challenged the pre-conceptions about working class people yet despite this class and education continues to be thought of in particular ways.

In Ramsbridge industry, paid employment and adult education were dominated by men. Education for working class people was specifically aimed at developing the skills needed for the workplace. Up until the late 1980s student intake at Ramsbridge College came predominately from the shipyard. In 1989 this accounted for 65 per cent of student enrolment. However, the 13,000 shipyard redundancies required the college to adopt a new stance. The first female principal in the county was appointed at Ramsbridge College in 1990, there was a new name and logo 'to reflect the changing role of the college in the community' and a new annexe was built, crèche facilities provided and a college carnival to promote the changes (Scholefield, 1991, p. 5). The college ran a woman's week with free taster sessions in areas such as painting and decorating. Encouraging the women of

Ramsbridge to gain new skills was viewed as important. In gaining employment the women could support their families until more orders came in to the shipyard and the men could be employed again. The actual rise in unemployment in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s was hidden by the number of men taking early retirement and going on disability benefit (Schifferes, 2009). In contrast employment figures for women continued to rise throughout the recession of this period. The employment rate for men fell from '92 per cent in 1971 to 79 per cent in 2008' (see appendix 15) while the rate for women increased from '56 per cent to 70 percent in the same period' (Socialtrends, 2009, p. 5.). This highlights how prevailing labour markets conditions reshaped both male and female employment.

Following redundancies emphasis was given to retraining former shipyard workers seeking new areas of employment. Approximately 400 now attended Ramsbridge College as full-time students retraining in brickwork, carpentry and information technology (IT). The new principal had an engineering background and in 1991 in partnership with the polytechnic sixty miles away, Ramsbridge College was validated for year one of the Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) Degree. These developments show some of the adjustments made by Ramsbridge College in response to the changes in employment that economic crisis brought about.

2.4 The foundation degree

My study focuses on a group of women studying for a foundation degree in Children, Young People and their Services. Foundation degrees are a vocational higher education qualification combining work-based learning with academic study (DfES, 2004b) which were first announced in David Blunkett's *Modernising Higher Education* speech (DfES, 2000). The first foundation degrees were delivered in England and Wales in 2001 and were seen by the Labour Government as a widening participation initiative to address perceived

skills shortages and contribute to lifelong learning (QAA, 2010). The intention is that students studying on a foundation degree programme gain subject specific knowledge, understanding and practical skills to meet employer needs (Taylor, 2012). Foundation degrees are equivalent to year two study of an Honours degree (DfEE, 2000) and provide an alternative route into higher education for “non ‘traditional A-level school leavers’” (HEFCE, 2007, p. 7.). In many ways the women in my study can be seen as *non-traditional students* and in that sense are not untypical of many foundation degree students. Three of the women had previously studied on the Access to Higher Education course and one from a level 3 Childcare Diploma.

Students studying on the foundation degree at Ramsbridge College when it was first introduced in 2003 were doing so to satisfy the workplace continuous professional development (CPD) requirements. This opportunity had not been available previously. Staff development had tended to be in the form of half a day training sessions on, for example, first aid or food hygiene and run through the local authority. Education was in the form of training and focused on the development of practical skills. The foundation degree was one initiative to help raise the status of the early years profession (QAA, 2008). The role of higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) was introduced in 2003. Employed by primary schools, one of their roles is to cover teacher’s ten per cent planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. An employee with a foundation degree was in a good position to be offered the role of higher level teaching assistant. In 2007 the government introduced the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). This qualification aimed at pre-school employees was intended to have a broad equivalence to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The foundation degree was one of the routes into the Early Years Professional Status. In the *Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare* (DCSF, 2009) the government set out their intentions to ‘consider making it a legal requirement that every full daycare setting has a graduate from 2015’ (DCSF, 2009, p. 13.). Most students studying on the foundation

degree at Ramsbridge College at this time were doing so in order to meet this perceived future requirement. Following a change in government in 2010, this future consideration was not pursued. As programme leader for the foundation degree I was concerned that student numbers would fall as a result. This did not happen for two reasons. When interviewing potential students I discovered that, firstly, those working with children and young people viewed having a foundation degree as an advantage when being interviewed for a new job alongside those without. Secondly, enjoying the increased responsibility, some of those who were working as higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) in schools now wanted to train as primary teachers. The foundation degree opens up a new space for many of the women in unintended ways. This looks attractive to those with limited qualifications. It is this kind of insider knowledge that that leads me to question the assumptions and intentions underpinning policy (Labaree 2002).

The foundation degree originally focused on the early years of childhood. It was updated during revalidation in 2011 to reflect the more integrated nature of working in children's services and a broader age range of children and young people of 0 -18 years old. The validation and revalidation process emphasises that higher education delivered in further education colleges is different than higher education delivered in universities and for the vast majority degree awarding power remains with universities. The implication of this is that overall control remains with the universities and the hierarchical system within education remains.

The foundation degree is delivered full-time over two years and part-time over three years. Most students are already in paid employment working with children or young people. Those students not in relevant employment are required to spend the equivalent of two days per week each academic year on placement in an education or care setting. Students are assessed using a wide variety of methods including essay and report writing, individual

and group presentation and portfolio. Contact time is condensed into one day per week. Classes start at 9:30 am and finish at 4:00pm. This arrangement accommodates those students who have family and work commitments. This arrangement came in response to student demand and is unique to Ramsbridge College and within the partnership. It is important to describe the foundation degree in order to see how it positions the women in the study.

2.5 Defining working class

During my pilot study I conducted a focus group session with eight students aged seventeen years old studying on a level 3 childcare course. On asking them to explain how they defined themselves I overheard the following conversation:

Student A - *"What's class"?*

Student B - *"Don't know..."*

Student A - *"What's class, have I got a class"?*

Student B - *"Don't know..."*

Student C - *"You know, upper class..."*

Student D - *"Middle class as well..."*

Student A - *"I'm middle class aren't I, I'm not upper class, I'm middle class"?*

Student B - *"Don't know..."*

Student A - *"Am I? Aren't I?"*

(I interjected to explain the difference between the classes to the whole group)

Student A - *"Well I'm not working class – I don't work"!*

(I interjected to explain the traditional link between classification and father's employment status)

Student A - *"But my dad doesn't work either"!*

It was evident from this conversation that student A was confused by the term *working class*. It was also evident that student A struggled to identify to which class they belonged because neither employment nor parental status provided useful markers. Prior to a group discussion prompted by my concerns, three of the students referred to themselves as middle class. Of the eight students who took part in the pilot study focus group five did not identify as being upper, middle or working class. These young women chose to identify themselves instead with terms such as teenager, student, and shop worker. This shows that seeing class in personal terms can be problematic and that self-identification is more personal. I deal with this situation when it arises in the classroom by encouraging students to find and discuss existing definitions. Students then reflect on their own experiences and form their own opinion of class before going on to produce their own definition.

During interview the four women studying on the foundation degree defined themselves as working class and as being from families with “*very strong working class roots*” (BI2P5L24). In comparison with the teenage students, when the women were growing up in the 1970s and 1980s the term working class was used as a social classification.

Introduced in the 1960s the social grade classification tool uses the ‘occupation of the chief income earner’ to determine the social grade of the household (Ipsos, 2009, p. 3.). The term working class refers to socio-economic groups IIIN to V (Dearing 1997, ONS, 2005). It referred to the employment status of their father as head of the family. This is a term that they heard and identified with. There is a sense of community, pride and determination associated with the term and the women spoke of hard work, managing with the little they had and a close knit community.

Through the social grade classification tool a middle class woman marrying a working class man would adopt the class categorisation of *working* (ipsos, 2009). The fact that the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) system was adopted in 2001

following a major review by the Economic and Social Research Council in 1994 indicates how problematic the term class is (ipsos, 2009, p. 4.). The classification given to households was now based on a wider range of criteria and took lifestyle choices into consideration. The term class is problematic both for individuals and society. The example from my study shows the personal difficulties that some people have in self identifying class. The new classification may appear fairer as it eliminates the problematic term working class yet the shift in classification reflecting on an increase in the focus on lifestyle only serves to highlight the fact that the concept of class is an attempt to see who benefits and who does not from the social arrangements and power structures that are in place.

During the late 1990s the United Kingdom was experiencing economic difficulties. One response to this was to suggest that identification as working class was the problem and that the solution was to develop middle class aspirations. This was exemplified by Blair's (1997) claim that "*we are all middle class now!*" Blair seems to have wanted to suggest aspiration could provide the 'means of individual salvation' as well as a means to economic recovery (Jones, 2011, p. 250.). By focusing on 'lifestyle choices' such as house ownership and having holidays abroad as determinates of class that were widely shared it was possible to avert attention from continuing inequalities. As Jones (2011, p. 248) points out, 'class denial is extraordinarily convenient'. Despite such denial, there remains a need for supermarket till operators and shop assistants. These roles are generally part time and taken by women. However the impact of the lower wages of these workers is barely felt when it comes to discussions of class.

Working class women who are able to leave their working class origins behind find it difficult to come to terms with a middle class identity. Plummer (2000) refers to academics such as Duffy and Walkerdine who despise what the term working class woman represents

or who when in particular company have avoided revealing their previous life. Reay (1998, p. 3.) refers to herself as 'ex-working class' and admits like her there are women who 'continue to struggle with an identity as middle class' (Reay, 1998, p. 3.). Plummer (2000, viii) prefers to use the term 'educated working class'. This might imply that the majority of the working class are 'uneducated' which ignores the value of, for example, practical skills. This makes it easier to see working class mothers as 'cigarette smoking' teenagers (Lawler, 2008, p. 135.) or 'notorious bingo women who neglect their children' (Hopkins, 1974, p. 25.). In this way working class women are perceived as a homogenous group. I argue that we are not all middle class and that we should all treat with caution invitations to see ourselves in this way especially if they have the effect of obscuring deep-seated social and economic problems.

As a child my family would have been classified as working class due to the employment status of my father as head of the household (ONS, 2005). This was reinforced by the fact that at that time we lived in rented accommodation on a council estate in one of the deprived wards of the town and my mother had to manage the household finances very carefully. In this way I could not call myself 'anything other than working class' (Reay, 1998, p. 42.). I share some similarities with the women in my study yet there are also marked differences between us.

One of the differences arose from the fact that on the maternal side of my family there were family members in what could be seen as 'middle class' occupations who had received education that could also be described in this way. My mother and uncle studied at the grammar school and so did my grandparents and their parents before them.

Professional occupations have also been prominent, family members have included a head teacher, teachers, a school inspector and a welfare officer, those that worked in industry were supervisors and managers. In the early 1900's my great aunt went on to study at

Norwich Teacher Training College. Unusually, despite getting married and having children she continued to teach until she retired. My mother taught English at Ramsbridge College for twenty years and although she retired nine years ago she remains involved in education through the home tutoring she offers. Reflecting on my ancestry I began to consider my own background. Although growing up in the same environment as my sister and brother I considered why it was I had made the decision to continue in education and progress through higher levels when they had not. I considered what being *working class* meant to me and realised that there is more than one way of being working class (Reay 1997, Greenbank 2009).

The way in which *place* contributes to my study informed my decision to refer to the women in my study as *working class*. In research question 1, I ask how the women's experiences of education reflect and challenge the assumptions underpinning widening participation policy. Research question 2 focuses on Ramsbridge, the working class town where the women live and study. In question 3 I ask how the women's experiences of education can shape widening participation practice in a further education college. In now appreciate some of the difficulties in talking about class.

2.6 The women in the study

My study focuses on four women. Their stories leading up to enrolment on the foundation degree provides an introduction to the women and situates them within my study.

Inclusion of these personal accounts also provides a starting point for suggesting that the assumptions underpinning widening participation policy are problematic.

Each introduction is a collection of biographical snippets. The introductions were produced by reading for the use of 'I' (Ribbens and Edwards 1998). Statements including *I*, were transferred from the transcripts produced during interviews conducted with each of the

women to produce the introductions. Each of the women was shown their introduction in its original verbatim form. Chloe laughed and thought it sounded “*just like her*” but did not like the verbatim as it made her sound “*thick*”. I could have asked the women to write their own introduction but I was aware of their workload and did not want them to produce a polished account that did not represent them. I could have written the introductions but I wanted to avoid diluting the character of the women. It was appropriate to use reading for the use of ‘I’ (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998) here so the women could introduce themselves broadly as in later chapters the freedom of topics is restricted. The women viewed the following accounts as a true representation of themselves at the beginning of the foundation degree.

Annie

I was born in Northern Ireland in the troubles. My dad was in prison for three years and when he came out he was made to leave. We moved to Scotland in the middle of the night because of what he was involved in and lived in a tiny flat until he could get on his feet. Then my mum and dad were splitting up, probably because of everything they’d been through and my dad was on the oil rigs and he’s a bit of a drinker. So we moved to the town and lived with my grandmother and then my mum and dad got back together and we went all through school and everything here. When I was growing up I always wanted to be a nurse like my aunt. It was my intention to go to sixth form and achieve my A levels. When I got there instead of working hard I became distracted by the social scene and being a teenager. My dad is very opinionated, a dominant character, he wanted me to do everything he didn’t so I rebelled and dropped out and got a job in a shop to earn money to party. I was very naive and thought I knew best but I did regret it later. I started out as a checkout operator in B&Q then moved up to customer service on the desk dealing with all the problems that customers brought in. Then I moved up to working in the garden centre and learning all about that side of things. I was married at nineteen and that didn’t work

out, he turned out to be a drinker too. So I was divorced at twenty six and that and the death of my mum set me off on a six month stint of alcohol. Then one day I woke up and thought no, I'm not doing what my dad does and worked hard. I was made manager by the age of twenty seven and I moved up to opening my own store when I opened up Pets at Home, I worked there for seven years. I left when I was having my second child to be a stay at home mum. After a difficult birth my third child came along with her own set of problems. It took a counsellor and cognitive behavioural therapist to get me back to being able to go out. I am a carer for my youngest daughter who has disabilities and my partner who has diabetic neuropathy; I still have bouts of anxiety. We live in a rented house at the moment in one of the deprived areas of the town but hope to move soon, we would like to get back on the housing market one day. As a full time mum and carer I did a Computer Literacy and Information Technology course (CLAIT) at the school and the lady that taught the CLAIT course was a friend from school and she suggested the Access to higher education course because it would replace the A levels that I hadn't finished at Sixth Form. I started the Access course and volunteered at the school where I am a governor. I finished the Access and at forty one years old I started the foundation degree.

Beth

I live in a neighbouring town with my family. I am married with two children and my husband doesn't work due to ill health. We own our home. I work as a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) four days a week in a local primary school and used to work for the Inland Revenue for many years, hated every minute of it, too structured for me. I was lead there by a failure in A-levels and so at eighteen I started this meandering journey through life looking for where I wanted to be. I was actually told when I was about fourteen at senior school that there was no point going into teaching, which is what I wanted to do because at that time teacher's jobs were very hard to get and basically I was put off the idea. I think that left me without a clear idea of where I wanted to go. So after

leaving Sixth Form, I spent a year at college doing hotel management, no idea why, I think because I could and then left there and worked in a local pub for a year. Then went to the Inland Revenue, had severe depression which lead to me loosing that job. I think my fear was learnt from my dad he was a very, very anxious person, anxious about everything to do with his children to the point of restricting our lives quite considerably really. Having suffered from fear and anxiety I now realise a lot of it is about control. Losing my job was the best thing really because I trained as a Teaching Assistant, which lead me back into education and I realised, yes, this is what I wanted to do. I signed up to start a foundation degree, it will be six years ago but then found out I was pregnant with my first child and decided that at my age, I was thirty-eight at the time, perhaps a baby and a job and university was too much. So that went by the bye and what really pushed me into doing it now, if I'm honest, is the change is the fee system because I thought if I don't get in now I'll never be able to afford it. I looked at the college, came here for interview, very convenient and that's basically how I ended up here at forty-three years old studying for a foundation degree.

Chloe

When I was at school I wanted to be a teacher. Thinking about it I feel a bit sad that nobody at school believed me, nobody thought I could actually become a teacher. I wasn't bad at school, I got all my GCSEs except maths and I didn't hang around with the bad kids or anything. I don't really know why they didn't think I'd amount to much. I left school in 2001 and came straight to college to do my diploma in childcare. I finished in 2003 but didn't pass; I failed my final exam twice because I can't do exams. I had lots of different job, so I worked in Tesco, I worked in a pub, I worked in a florist, I worked in a call centre, I worked in a kitchen in a factory, I worked in all different places. I actually went to Estonia for a month as well to stay with my friend in 2007 and I sort of pretty much played in the snow for a month and got drunk. I got back and was working at the Co-op and I

thought right I'm going back to school. So I planned on going back to school to do my maths because that was my only D but then I accidentally got pregnant instead. So I had my daughter, waited a year did my maths, I did get my C – it was a shock! I knew I was going to do something with it when I'd got it but I didn't know what. There were only two of us who were not doing the Access course so they told me all about that and I decide, right I'll do that next then see. It wasn't actually until my first day on the Access that I got really scared because when I went in everybody was dead set on exactly what they were doing and I just wanted to warm my brain back up. It didn't take me long to get back into it and then I wanted to do the three year straight teaching course. My tutor explained all of that to me and the foundation degree at college and I thought right I'll definitely do that instead. I moved out of home, we just live in a two up two down rented house me and my daughter in the ghetto of Ramsbridge. I started the foundation degree when I was twenty-five years old. I have a new boyfriend and I work in the local Co-op on a Saturday and Sunday for ten hours.

Donna

Well, there's me and my husband and three children. We live in [a deprived area of Ramsbridge] but we own our own home. My husband works for himself as a builder and I've always just sort of been at home doing various courses and things. When I was at school there'd been quite a lot of bullying and it had really knocked my confidence. I think it did affect my school work. I remember feeling under a lot of pressure when I was doing my GCSEs. I was predicted A's and I seemed to be the only one out of my friends who was taking it so seriously as well. I was going on to do art and design because I have always been quite creative but I didn't go because after the bullying, it ended with me being really badly beaten up, and it stopped me from going. I just thought what if I come up against the same thing again? My way of dealing with it was just don't put yourself in that environment where you've got to meet new people because then there's a chance that

one might not like you and I just thought I might have to go through the same thing again. I left school and worked in retail, in Marks and Spencers, in New Look but then I had my first child at nineteen and got married at nineteen and I've been at home ever since, with my husband working I just stayed at home with the kids. But then I went to the Citizen's Advice to do a little course because I knew that I had to push myself to mix because I was getting a bit low at home because I wanted to use my brain. So I went to citizen's advice started to enjoy that, I thought about studying Law. The fella who was training me was really good but then he left through ill health. I was just sort of left in limbo because I was the only trainee left, the others had dropped out. There was nobody there to train me. I felt really awkward like I was in the way. I was really upset, I walked in one day and everyone just looked at me like I was a spare part. I felt as though I was crushed again. I still thought of studying Law and that's why I came to the college to do the Access course. The tutor for that sort of ended up pointing me in the direction of radiography. I ended being put off Law because I was told it was quite competitive and it was really hard to get in to and things so I didn't go in for that. I went on to do radiography, but the travelling and everything was awful. We had no time as a family so it got really stressful. I was unhappy about the way things were going so I left and thought I would look into what was here at the college and what would fit more around the kids more around us as a family so when I was thirty-three years old I started the foundation degree.

2.7 Autobiography of the question

The stories the women told me provided insight into their lives. These would not have been possible without their openness and trust for which I am grateful. Some of their stories made me smile, some made me cross and some were similar to my own. It was difficult to approach such compelling stories from a purely academic perspective and I found myself unable to move forward in my writing. While interviewing Donna I realised that I had lived in the same street where she now lives. Reflecting on that connection and about my

experiences of life and education made me appreciate that the aspirations I had had when I had lived there provided the impetus for me to move my research forward. I began the process of reflecting on my own experiences of education in relation to the questions I was exploring in my own study to help me make sense of the women's stories. Like Burke (2012) I found Miller's concept of the autobiography of the question (Miller 1995) intriguing and helpful in understanding my positioning in the relationship between the participants, the study and myself. My positioning is the basis of my questioning of the assumptions found elsewhere, for example in widening participation policy and academic literature. The practice of reflexivity locates me as the researcher in the wider social context of historical power and inequality, highlighting that research is not only 'autobiographical but also biographical' (Burke, 2012, p. 78.). In this way research is personal and my interpretation of the women's experiences is open to reinterpretation by the reader.

2.8 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the research context. It has charted the growth and decline of Ramsbridge town and situated it within a working class community. The origins of Ramsbridge College and its links to the needs of male dominated industry have been presented and the role of the college in responding to the changing needs of the community set out. The four women and the particular foundation degree situated at the heart of my research have been introduced.

The geographical, social and economic situation of Ramsbridge College is unique. Specific conclusions drawn will go on to inform future practice within the college. Despite its distinctiveness my study will offer lessons elsewhere. It contributes to the understanding of aspiration and self-esteem levels in a particular group of working class women yet also national debates relating to social mobility, equality and social justice.

The following chapter will establish a justification for my study focus by exploring the discussions around how working class women studying higher education in further education are represented within the widening participation landscape.

Chapter 3: Review of literature

3.1 Introduction to chapter

The changes in higher education over the last sixty years have been dramatic. The landscape has been transformed in nature and ‘social significance’ as a result of the mass expansion of provision (Blackburn and Jarman, 1993, p. 197). This transformation in higher education has been accompanied by a focus on the need to widen participation and underpinned by the notion that a more highly qualified workforce may help the United Kingdom face an ‘uncertain globalised future’ (Tomlinson, 2008, p. 7.). A higher education system is considered to be a ‘mass system’ when between sixteen and fifty per cent of the eligible population participate and universal when this number reaches above fifty per cent (Trow, 1973). The Office for National Statistics defines an eligible population in the United Kingdom as those who are active in the labour market; ‘women aged between twenty one and fifty nine and men aged between twenty one and sixty four’ (ONS, 2013a, p. 1.). In 2012 twelve million people or thirty eight per cent of the eligible population were graduates (ONS, 2013a). This was an increase of thirty five per cent since 1950 when just three per cent of the eligible population were graduates (DfES, 2004c) a level that fell below the 16% level used to define a system as a elite one (Trow, 1973). This literature review establishes a justification for my study focus by exploring the discussions around how working class women studying higher education in further education are represented within widening participation policy.

Two initial questions helped focus the literature review, these were:

1. What has led to the introduction of the foundation degree?
2. What factors shape the perception of education that some working class women studying on a foundation degree in a further education college have?

This literature review explores the evolution of widening participation policy in relation to social class and gender. The key documents selected are the *Robbins Report* (Robbins, 1963a), the *Dearing Report* (Dearing, 1997) and *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003c) which are chosen as each one is the key document within different eras of widening participation policy and is the basis of my rationale. I use these documents to explore whether there are implicit assumptions that play out in policy that are consistent over a fifty year period.

The Robbins Report and the Dearing Report were ‘officially sponsored’ reviews announced following government concerns that higher education in the United Kingdom was not meeting national needs (Bathmaker, 2003, p. 1.). The aim of the Robbins Report was to review ‘patterns’ of full-time participation (Robbins, 1963, p. 1.). In doing so it made recommendations about access and funding. In the main aim of reviewing ‘funding’ the Dearing Report made recommendations about participation and access (Dearing, 1997, p. 1.). As a White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* set out the government’s policy for higher education in England (DfES, 2003, p. 2.). With broad aims relating to funding, access and increasing participation *The Future of Higher Education* reaffirmed ‘existing policy’ rather than proposing new initiatives (Greenbank, 2006, p. 154.). Thus these documents evidence a remarkable similarity of view over the entire period.

An exploration of widening participation policy is underpinned by a number of implicit and explicit assumptions that locate people in relation to higher education in particular ways. A recurring theme is that working class students have low aspirations (Dearing, 1997, DfEE 1998, DfES 2003, DfES, 2004, Francis 2006, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011). An assumption of low aspiration can be seen to derive from viewing working class students as a homogenous group (Dearing, 1997, DfES 2003, HEFCE, 2007). Some commentators suggest that they are less likely to study to ‘increase knowledge and understanding for their

own sake' (Dearing, 1997, p. 72.) and more likely to lack academic skills (European Commission, 1993, DfES 2003) and support structures (DfES, 2006b, Milburn 2010, SMCP, 2013) which enable them to study. This thesis argues that these assumptions continue to influence policy and furthermore, that they are reflected in educational practice. In particular my findings show how these assumptions work out in relation to working class women studying higher education in a further education college.

Before considering the *Robbins Report*, the *Dearing Report* and *The Future of Higher Education* I start with higher education in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in order to locate the subsequent development of widening participation policy. Exploring how participation has been expanded over the last two centuries makes it possible to see how working class women have been positioned as a focus of national concern.

3.2 Historical context to higher education in the UK (1900-1962)

Education policy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to reflect and reinforce a class system based on birthright and wealth (Ball, 2008). It drew on assumptions that different social classes required different types of education. Similar thinking was evident in relation the education received by men and by women (Tomlinson, 2008). In 1900 less than one per cent of eighteen and nineteen year olds entered university full-time, almost all of whom were middle and upper class men educated in selective schools (DfES, 2004c).

This system provided an academic and social milieu which was geared to prepare mainly male students for professional careers (Whyte, 2003). In comparison education for working class girls was vocational and was focused on developing skills in preparation for serving middle and upper class women and 'all men' (Plummer, 2000, p. 3.). Aspects of *service*

included roles within the home, and outside the home through shop and factory work and domestic service. Although the education of women was viewed as necessary too much was perceived to be detrimental to the 'delicate female constitution' (Mc Dermid, 1995, p. 108.). Expectations based on class and gender meant that educational policy tended to be informed by perceptions of working class women, as unable to benefit from higher education (Ball, 2008). The participation of working class women was neither expected nor encouraged except in unusual and rare circumstances. One of these exceptions was the University of London which in 1836 offered external degrees in technical colleges as well as distance learning courses. Such part-time study and franchised degrees provided a route into higher education for a slightly broader range of students including working class women (Stephens, 1998). The few working class women that went on to study in universities often struggled to finance their studies even if supported by families who saw an academic education as a way for the whole family to 'climb out of poverty' (Robinson, 2009, p. 4.). The lack of opportunity for most working class women in comparison meant that their educational choices were severely constrained.

At the start of the twentieth century there were only eleven higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (Matheson, 2008, pp. 277-279) compared to the 165 in 2010-2011 (HESA, 2012, p. 4.). This lack of provision was reflected by the fact that by the start of the Second World War less than two per cent of men and half a per cent of women participated in higher education (Blackburn and Jarman, 1993.). Immediately after the Second World War there was an increase in the number of women university students, probably reflecting changing attitudes and the greater availability of government grants (Blackburn and Jarman, 1993.). Despite this increase, women continued to be under-represented, accounting for only a third of the university population nationally and one in ten in elite universities such as Cambridge (Shaw-Miller, 2001, p. 14.). Higher education continued to be dominated by middle class men (Fuller et al, 2011).

By 1960 the number of eighteen to nineteen year old full-time students entering higher education in the United Kingdom had increased from three per cent equating to 140,000 in 1950 to five per cent, equating to an additional 40,000 students within the higher education system (DfES, 2004c). This did not stem from any particular policy and appears to have been the result of increasing prosperity and demands for a more highly qualified workforce following an economic move by the government towards industry and professional careers (Lowe, 1988). The number of sixth form students achieving two or more A-Levels also increased sharply from 27,000 in 1956 to more than 60,000 by 1964 which added to the demands that higher education provision needed further expansion (Chitty, 2009, p. 197.).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries few people thought that working class women might access higher education (Mc Dermid, 1995). The assumption that different social classes and genders required different types of education meant that education for working class girls was vocational and choices were severely constrained. With changing attitudes and a greater availability of government grants following the Second World War the number of women university students increased. However, the majority continued to be drawn from middle and upper class families. The following section of the literature review will explore the first of the three selected documents. I will use the Robbins Report to explore whether the assumptions underpinning education policy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were still evident in the 1960s.

3.3 The Robbins Report policy period (1963-1996)

The Robbins Report was commissioned to 'review the patterns of full-time higher education in Great Britain' (Robbins, 1963a, p. 1.). This followed the perceived 'national need' (Robbins, 1963a, p. 4.) for the expansion of higher education and increasing concerns from ministers about the inconsistent support of industrial training (Ministry of

Education, 1956). An assumption underpinning the Robbins Report was that a higher qualified workforce would enable the country to maintain a 'competitive position' in an uncertain international future (Robbins, 1963a, p. 6.).

The Robbins Report was published in the run up to the 1963 election. The consensus across the political spectrum that higher education provision should expand was shown by the fact that the Robbins Report recommendations were accepted by the Conservative government within twenty-four hours of the report's release (Simon, 1991, Gibney, 2013). The implication of this was less that the report could be used to win votes in any forthcoming election and more that the Robbins Report chimed in well with an official mindset that a better qualified workforce would address the issue of the country's uncertain economic future. The call for a system where universities would be 'responsible for the vast majority of degree courses' recommended by the Robbins Report has been documented as being rejected by the Wilson government elected in 1964 (Chitty, 2009). This shows that despite consistent thinking within the government there were discrepancies. The Robbins Report, however, did not plan a university controlled higher education system but rather sought to 'establish a small Consultative Council, composed of people representative of various educational and other interests' covering the entire field of higher education (Robbins, 1963, p. 250.). This meant that further education colleges delivering higher education would have an equal responsibility and input in to the system. Robbins Report committee member Harold Shearman was not in 'entire agreement with the recommendations' produced by the committee, believing a 'complicated set of interlocking committees and joint committees at central government level, with final responsibility shared between three ministries, would be liable to produce delay and compromise' (Robbins, 1963, p. 293.). The Wilson government chose to ignore the recommendation for shared responsibility made by Robbins and rejected Shearman's recommendation of one university controlled higher education system. This suggests that

ideas from opposite ends of the spectrum were viewed by ministers as extreme. This is important to know because it illustrates that educational provision was still being seen as needing to be separate. In response the Advanced Further Education sector was created to prevent a university controlled higher education system. Two distinct higher education sectors were set up under the binary system; the self-governing sector consisting of old and new universities and the public sector consisting of polytechnics and colleges. The intention of the binary system echoed ideals of social equality and the redistribution of opportunity and wealth yet an implicit historical assumption underpinning its creation was that different classes require a different type of education.

The expansion of higher education in the years that followed the Robbins Report meant that more 'non-traditional' students had the opportunity to study at a higher level but it did not result in a greater equality of educational opportunity. In 1960 four per cent of young people entered full time courses at university with only one per cent of working class girls and three per cent of working class boys (Robbin, 1963, p. table 5 and table 21). In 1945 only two per cent of the population participated in higher education this rose to eight per cent in 1966 (Stuart, 2012, p. 38.). In 1977 thirty per cent for those in the top three social class categories and just six per cent for the bottom three categories participated (Stuart, 2012, p. 54.) (see appendix 6). The binary system was opposed by advocates of inclusive higher education as in their view, it maintained an elitist approach. Leading academics believed that as long as there were different types of education, student selection would exist (Pedley, 1963). I argue that this approach means that some students, such as those from working class backgrounds, would continue to be marginalised. The binary system was developed to prevent universities from monopolising the degree market. With polytechnics and some colleges delivering higher education this aim was achieved, however, degree awarding powers remained with the university along with the overseeing and validating of new courses. Although this system preserved the practice of an

undergraduate degree as entry to higher study it reinforced the notion that different types of education were still required. The Robbins Report did not however recommend that universities should deliver all higher education. An implicit assumption underpinning the Robbins Report was that different classes require a different type of education. The Robbins Report suggested a 'need for a variety of institutions' (Robbins, 1963, p. 8.). The function of these institutions was to differ depending on location, the 'nature of the work done' and how 'appropriate' it was to the work (Robbins, 1963, p. 9.). The aim of polytechnics and colleges was to 'serve local needs' and to fulfil the perceived growing demand for vocational, professional and industry-based higher education (Robbins, 1963, p. 159.). In response polytechnics and colleges offered predominately sector endorsed higher level vocational courses such as the Higher National Certificate and Diploma to apprentices on day release from work. Courses such as The Higher National Certificate and the Diploma were not delivered in universities (Midgley, 1996). Course choice in colleges was limited, vocational or non-academic in nature and geared towards male dominated industry such as engineering (Pratt, 1997). Each of these implications of the report, when taken together acted to position working class students in general and working class women in particular. Vocational qualifications are viewed as a pre-condition for widening participation in higher education (Education and Employment Committee, 2001). In enabling some non-traditional level three qualifications to become entry qualifications for some higher level programmes more non-traditional students have the opportunity to access higher education. This connection is flawed (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1991) due to the fact that non-traditional students with vocational qualifications have a constrained choice in the higher level programmes available to them to study. In this way educational expansion fails to result in greater 'equality of educational opportunity' (Ertl et al, 2010, p. 75.). Focusing on different facets of higher education meant that the two halves of the binary system tended to attract different types of student. Those living within working class towns tended to have vocational qualifications rather than A levels and were often

unable to travel to study traditional subjects due to work and family commitments (Christie, 2007).

Higher education offered through a university partnership within the public sector has a vested interest in education for the benefit of the state. In offering higher education to further education colleges in this way, the government was able to exert more control over the target group and the structure of expansion (Pratt, 1997). Higher education offered in universities in comparison was not limited to delivering level 1 of programmes and was assured as a self governing sector (Chitty, 2009). In this way education is of benefit to the individual rather than society as a whole. Some polytechnics and colleges were criticised for mimicking universities when the original intention was for a more 'vocational' approach (Robbins, 1963, p.7.). The thirty polytechnics created from over fifty colleges (Pratt, 1997) following the Robbins Report in essence were rebadged existing colleges of technology (Foskett, 2011). By providing different experiences of higher education the binary policy reinforced an elite education system as working class students tended not to have a choice as to where and what they studied. Yet polytechnics and colleges flourished under the binary system. In 1981 Margaret Thatcher announced a two year cut in public spending to help fight the recession. As a result more than 20,000 less university places were made available and financial penalties were imposed on universities failing to meet target numbers (Thatcher, 1981). Funded through local authorities rather than directly by the government, as a result of the binary system, polytechnics and colleges were less hard hit by the reduced unit costs than universities (Matheson, 2008). Many of those students denied a university place turned to polytechnics and colleges (Wagner, 1989). This resulted in an increase in student numbers that by 1991 saw polytechnics with 'twice as many part time students as the universities' (Pratt, 1997, p. 1.). Polytechnics became the larger sector in higher education, their success being in increasing the numbers of mature students and those with non traditional qualifications including women (Pratt, 1997). Further education

colleges increased the geographical spread and range of higher education (DES, 1989). In providing opportunities for more students to study at a higher level and in accomplishing the aim to widen participation, polytechnics and colleges were at the forefront of expansion within higher education (CHERI, 2011, p. 15.). This illustrates how policy can have unintended outcomes which can open up spaces for some working class people.

The Robbins Report initiated 'immediate changes' in higher education and the policy that followed was an important element in the expansion of provision (Layard et al, 1969, p. 22.). The contribution of the report however, should not be overvalued. It is highly likely that higher education would have expanded even without the Robbins Report as a result of other developments that were taking place. By the mid-1950s moves towards a mass system of higher education were apparent in most advanced European countries (Edwards, 1992). The rapid increase of numbers entering higher education internationally after 1955 is arguably a result of a change in the 'international climate of economic and social thinking' (Edwards, 1992, p. 67.) which saw the value of higher education in a 'fiercely competitive world of the future' (Robbins, 1963, p. 5.). In the United Kingdom this environment had been prepared by the Butler Act (1944) and the 1945 Education (Scotland) Act. Both acts identified the need for expansion within education to help 'meet the needs of the population of their area' (Ministry of Education, 1944, p. 4.). Both acts recommended raising the school leaving age in the United Kingdom from fourteen to fifteen years old, made secondary education free and made further education provision available for those 'able and willing to profit' (Ministry of Education, 1944, p. 33.). In this way access to higher education was created for those, such as working class students, who would not have previously had the opportunity. This provides another example of how some educational policy does not comply with assumptions about working class people.

Constrained choice and selection was still however a feature of the education system.

Policy in one domain can seem to be at odds with policy found elsewhere. The implicit assumption that different social classes require a different type of education was strengthened with the introduction of the Higher National Diploma (HND) in which was offered as an alternative route into higher education within technical colleges. Places within universities were limited so alternative qualifications and provision were created. By 1963 the number of entrants participating in higher education was already 130 per cent higher than in 1939 and over 40 per cent higher than the post-war peak in 1948 (Blackburn and Jarman, 1993). The expansion of higher education provision was established before the Robbins Report could have taken effect (Willetts, 2013).

The Robbins Report was an important example of how policy was moving away from the notion that only a few, notably middle-class young men with a grammar or public school education (Tomlinson, 2008), had the academic ability to study at university (Barr and Glennerster 2013). The Robbins committee drew on the work of eminent figures within the discipline of sociology of education. Floud (1963) suggested that levels of intelligence were not determined by social class but were greatly affected by the home environment. In stating that the 'family background is a powerful influence in determining a child's educational career' the Robbins Report reinforced a developing belief in the 1950s that the link between a child's class of origin and their class of destination would be broken if the state invested to ensure the opportunity to become socially mobile (Robbins, 1963, p. 258.). This statement suggests that the Robbins committee rejected a deterministic theory of intelligence yet in using the phrase those 'qualified by ability' to benefit the suggestion that almost everyone could benefit from higher education was far from being understood in policy terms. Individuals with traditional qualifications, such as A-levels, were perceived as being 'qualified by ability and attainment' (Robbins, 1963a, p. 1.). In this way access to higher education was based on a particular type of merit.

A key idea within the Robbins Report was that access to higher education should be based on merit and not the ability to pay. The notion of there being a 'so-called pool of ability' was becoming less acceptable (Robbins, 1963, p. 49.). In a move away from being based on class alone, educational policy changed in response to focus on ability. Robbins recommended growth within higher education for all those who were 'qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so' (Robbins, 1963a, p. 8.). This became known as the *Robbins principle*. An assumption underpinning Robbins' meritocratic principle was that women tended to lack a support structure to enable them to participate within higher education. In this way women were positioned generally. The Robbins committee opposed the introduction of a loans-based system amid concerns that debt may discourage women from studying at a higher level as 'the eligibility for marriage of the more educated would be diminished by the addition to their charms of what would be in effect a negative dowry' (Robbins, 1963, p. 211.). Women were now viewed as being 'capable of benefiting' from higher education (Robbins, 1963a, p. 1.). More women were able to study at a higher level following Robbins' recommendation of the introduction of grants. The ratio of women participating in higher education increased from being outnumbered 3:1 in 1961/62 to the majority they have currently (Barr and Glennerster, 2013, p.2.). In 2012/2013 male participation rates were 38.6 per cent and female participation rates were 47.4 per cent (DBIS, 2014, p. 1.).

Robbins identified that the 'reserves of untapped ability may be greatest in the poorer sections of the community' (Robbins, 1963, p. 53.). In encouraging those with traditional A level qualifications who would not have done so to participate within higher education the Robbins Report was however, ensuring that it was more of the same predominately young, middle class, full time individuals who accessed higher education rather than working class women. The focus on traditional qualifications ensured that most working class women were denied the opportunity to access higher education. In being

insufficiently qualified through their vocational qualifications, working class women were still being positioned particularly as unable to benefit from higher education. Restricting the focus of widening participation policy to such a specific group as those with A level qualifications relied on a consistent number of applicants year on year. The Green Paper *Higher Education into the 1990s* and the report *Future Trends in Higher Education*, predicted that the number of people in the sixteen to twenty-nine age bracket would decrease by approximately 0.6 million between 1981 and 1996, due to the fall in birth rate (DES/SED 1978, DES, 1979). The decline of potential A-level students signalled a potential negative impact on the expansion of higher education and the aim to improve the economy and society. This potential situation presents a lack of traditional higher education students. Alternative provision delivered on alternative sites was required until the numbers of traditional students increased. In this way working class students were being targeted to fulfil a specific short term purpose. The number of mature full time students in comparison had increased steadily from 8,500 in 1971/2 to 10,200 in 1979/80 (Squires, 1981). *Higher Education into the 1990s* (DES/SED, 1978) and the *Future Trends in Higher Education* (DES, 1979) both predicted that while the number of young people was declining, those in the thirty to forty-four age bracket would increase by approximately 1.6 million between 1981 and 1996. This highlighted the potential value of mature students to higher education institutes in preventing the decline of higher education in the 1990s. I argue that there are discourses in widening participation policy that could have very different implications for working class women and that these run counter to some of the old assumptions. In highlighting the potential value of mature students *Higher Education into the 1990s* (DES/SED, 1978) supported the notion of expansion in higher education set out by Robbins to 'make better use of untapped ability' (Robbins, 1963 p. 66.). The Green Paper suggested increasing the number of mature students generally and working class students specifically while continuing to increase the number of women (DES, 1978). The election of a Conservative government in May 1979 hampered the

implementation of these plans. In 1981 Margaret Thatcher announced cuts in public expenditure and the income of universities was cut by 20 per cent in the following two year period (Thatcher, 1981). Market mechanisms were introduced to govern the education system following a shift towards education being viewed more and more as a business (OECD, 2012). The system based on merit and not the ability to pay set out by the Robbins report did not go away, however, the shift in ability to pay was a new feature in the debate.

The term *market* refers to a system based on commercial exchange, self-regulated through the ‘impersonal forces of demand and supply’ (Heywood, 1994, p. 283.). The call for higher education places was created in response to the need that seemed to be highlighted in policy. In responding to perceived consumer wishes, in encouraging freedom of choice and in promoting efficiency, the market was viewed by the Conservative government as the only viable means of creating wealth (Brown, 2011b). Applying the principles of the market to how further education is organised gave the Conservative government the confidence to face a ‘fiercely competitive world of the future’ (Robbins, 1963, p. 5.). The market system was perceived as the most efficient means of identifying where resources should be allocated within education (Greenbank, 2006). Choice, competition and personal responsibility was encouraged (Hodgson 1999) yet the very nature of the market tended to generate social costs. This suggested a need for the market to be regulated, however, concerns about disadvantaged groups were largely absent from government rhetoric (Ross 2003) as those inequalities remaining as a result of the market were perceived as a natural necessity in enabling the economy to run effectively (Loxley and Thomas 2001). In stating that the values of a free society are grounded in the ‘common sense of people who know that it takes effort to achieve success’ Thatcher suggested that those who do not succeed are undeserving, dismissing inequality based on such characteristics as gender and class which are viewed as irrelevant within a market economy (Thatcher, 1981, p. 1.). In this way the marketisation of higher education sustains the marketisation of society (Brown,

2011b). Higher education has become increasingly imbued with the rhetoric of the market; this has certain implication for people like the women in my study. Failing to recognise inequality within widening participation policy means that particular groups such as working class women continue to be marginalised.

The attempt to apply market thinking combined with the economic downturn has implications for how different students were positioned. The binary system was abolished following The Further and Higher Education Act (1992) and the new higher education sector was reformed. This could have heralded an end to old divides between higher education sectors however limited course choice and access to institutions prevented this from happening. Polytechnics and colleges ceased to be controlled by local authorities and higher education funding councils were established to replace the Universities Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council. The removal of the binary system following the adoption of market mechanisms within education encouraged greater competition between higher education institutions and guaranteed expansion at a reduced cost (Bathmaker, 2003). The creation of a two sector system of higher and further education regulated by parallel public bodies was legislated for. This has been documented as ensuring that a hierarchical system remained (Parry, 2008) yet in having a two sector system aimed at different establishments in different locations and different students, traditional universities and polytechnics and colleges were never really in competition. University numbers doubled as public sector institutions converted into universities and national funding councils were established for higher education (Mackinnon and Statham 1999). By the mid 1990s the combined effects of underfunding and expansion (Watson and Taylor, 1998) had left the university system in 'crisis' (Bathmaker, 2003, p. 14.). Young people from working class backgrounds were more likely to participate in higher education than ever before (see appendix 6). In 1960 approximately twenty three per cent of those entering higher education were from working class backgrounds, by 1990 this had risen to

thirty three per cent (DfES, 2003b). The expansion of higher education has increased rather than reduced class differences as working class students continue to dominate participation within post 1992 higher education institutions. The gap between those from higher social classes and lower social classes participating within higher education has also grown. In 1960 there were just 200,000 full-time students studying within higher education yet the gap between the two groups was actually less in 1960 than in 2000 (see appendix 6). The increasingly hierarchal nature of higher education suggests some groups such as working class women, continued to be marginalised through constrained choices.

3.4 The Dearing Report policy period (1997-2002)

The Dearing Report sought to ‘make recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education’ should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom (Dearing, 1997, p. 3.). This followed the ‘national need and demand from students’ for the expansion of higher education (Dearing, 1997, p. 7.) and concerns that there had been a policy commitment ‘to expansion without ensuring that funding could be made available to support that expansion in the long term’ (Dearing, 1997, p. 49.). The assumption, that a higher qualified workforce would enable the country to ‘sustain a competitive economy’ in a changing international market (Dearing, 1997, p.9.) was shared by both the Robbins and Dearing Reports. This illustrates that there are consistent assumptions circulating within the government.

The timing of the Dearing Report makes it difficult to gauge how differing political influences affected its progress. The inquiry was initiated before the 1997 general election but received support from the Labour Party in opposition (Parry and Fry, 1999) and when ‘New Labour’ took office. It is apparent that such enquiries are never produced in a political vacuum. It also shows that policy continuities between different administrations

are always a factor. In this case, the outgoing government did not see higher education review as a major issue and so had little incentive to resolve it in advance of the 1997 election.

The Dearing committee was tasked to address the variation in adequacy of the financial support that students received (Dearing, 1997, p. 48.). The introduction of the student loans system following the Robbins Report was no longer financially sustainable. The Dearing Report recommended that some of the fees being paid by the state would in future be paid by students and their families. In expecting students to 'enter into an obligation to make contributions to the cost of their higher education' once in work, the report assumed that future students would be in a financial position to be able to repay fees (Dearing, 1997, p. 2.). As with the Robbins Report, the Labour Government decided to implement their own policy solutions rather than those in the Dearing Report. Labour ministers acknowledged Dearing's recommendation that students contribute to course costs and disregarded what the report said about living costs for poorer students; many of whom lived in poverty and were 'forced to seek employment for excessive hours in term time to the detriment of their studies' (Dearing, 1997, p. 48.). The government wanted to save as much money as they could in order to 'sustain a competitive economy' in a changing international market (Dearing, 1997, p. 49.). Effectively the government was 'greedy' (Watson and Amoah, 2007, p. 29.). Maintenance grants were abolished following the Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998) and means tested tuition fees of up to £1000 per year were introduced and were to be paid back once the student was in employment. All student grants were in essence turned into loans. In this way funding issues such as how to pay for higher education facing some students such as working class women were maintained rather than addressed (Bathmaker, 2003). I argue that these funding issues continue. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) saw an instant fall in numbers

applying to higher education. In 1997 459,000 people applied to study in higher education, a year later in 1998 numbers of applicants had fallen to 446,000 (UCAS, 2011, p. 3.). The number of applicants continued to fall for three years after the introduction of tuition fees (see appendix 11). The gap in participation rates by social class groups continued to widen during this time (see appendix 6), indicating that higher numbers from under-represented groups such as working class women were failing to participate within higher education than others. In this way marginalised groups such as working class women bore the brunt of policy change, where paradoxically, widening participation policy failed to provide an equality of educational opportunity. This highlights the unintended consequences of policy and supports my argument that these policy changes show how the assumptions continue to operate. Part time numbers increased from 180,000 in 1998/1999 to 270,000 in 2001/02 (UCAS, 2011, p. 10.). (see appendix 12). The number of full time mature entrants to higher education has remained consistent.

Dearing suggested that traditional entry to higher education was ‘only one aspect’ of the national need suggesting that those with vocational qualifications should also be part of *the learning society* and required to ‘renew, update and widen their knowledge and skills throughout life’ (Dearing, 1997, p. 10.). Although Dearing and the secretary of state agreed on the notion of lifelong learning (DfEE, 1998) working class students were still positioned as a homogeneous *other*, targeted as lacking skills. The Dearing Report recommended that ‘projects designed to address low expectations and achievement’ be implemented with immediate effect (Dearing, 1997, p. 108.). This recommendation was underpinned by the explicit assumption that individuals from working class backgrounds were ‘under represented’ within higher education due to low aspiration levels (Dearing, 1997, p. 108.), poor qualification grades (Dearing, 1997, p. 103.). Dearing suggested specifically that students lacked communication skills (Dearing, 1997, p. 34.). These assumptions reflected an academic deficit model where those from working class backgrounds are held

responsible for the low numbers in higher education and individuals are viewed as needing to change (Jones and Thomas, 2005). This is evident when the Dearing Report lists those from 'lower socio-economic groups', 'certain ethnic groups' and 'those with disabilities' as groups who tend not to participate in higher education (Dearing Report, 1997, p. 10.). Although this list serves to identify widening participation target groups it also has the effect of highlighting those who do not participate as instrumental in fixing the problem. In this way groups such as working class women are given the responsibility of fulfilling their potential, modifying their behaviour and investing in their personal development for the benefit of 'society as a whole' (Dearing, 1997, p. 4.). In this situation those who do not participate through choice or due to educational inequalities based on class or gender could be blamed for the lack of economic progress in the United Kingdom. In this way working class students tended to be positioned as *other*, as lacking skills and as a homogeneous group. The implicit assumption underpinning the Dearing report as with the Robbins Report is that different classes require a different type of higher education.

In focusing on aspiration and admissions the Dearing Report disregarded later stages of the student life cycle such as student experience and transition into employment yet Report 6 states that students from lower socio-economic groups are twice as likely to have low starting salaries (Dearing, 1997, p. 90.). This contradicts the assumption underpinning contemporary policy of education for the purpose of improving the economy and society through social mobility. In 2001 only thirty five per cent of higher education institutes made reference to widening participation statements in their teaching and learning strategies (HEFCE, 2001b). In a move away from a deficit model to one where higher education institutions were expected to make changes the document *Strategies for Widening Participation in Higher Education* (HEFCE, 2001) emphasised the concerns the government had about stages four, student experience and stage five, progression unto employment of the student life cycle. The document highlighted the need to make the

connection between widening participation strategies and teaching and learning (Chambers and Paull, 2008). Later reports such as the *Review of 2001 Widening Participation Strategies and Action Plans* (HEFCE, 2003) and *HEFCE Widening participation and Fair Access Research Strategy* (HEFCE, 2004) showed a move towards a broader view of widening participation policy.

The Dearing Report stressed that the main causes of uneven participation within higher education lay 'outside' the system (Dearing, 1997, p. 107.). Non-traditional students, such as working class women, were viewed as having a less effective support structure than their traditional counterparts. In this way working class women were positioned generally as a homogeneous group. As a result of policy changes the duty of providing support fell to the higher education institutes. Extra costs for recruiting and retaining non-traditional students through embedding widening participation in quality assurance systems, initial advice and guidance, handling credit transfer, and ongoing support were incurred by the higher education institutes. In this way the negative impact of applying market criteria to higher education institutes was highlighted. This suggests that the value of non-traditional students continuing in education and studying at a higher level was viewed in more than just monetary terms in 'enabling personal development for the benefit of individuals and society as a whole' (Dearing, 1997, p. 4.). In highlighting the need for higher education institutes to transform the way they operated the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) appears to diverge from the academic deficit model underpinning the assumptions made within the Dearing Report. In discussing the style of curriculum and the ease to which students from 'diverse backgrounds' integrate into a course, made evident in the Tomlinson Report (1996), HEFCE recognised that some students may have particular needs and that it is the institutions that need to make changes rather than the students (HEFCE, 2001b, para. 99). Although viewed as a move away from blaming students

solely, the utilitarian deficit model tends to lay blame also with the institution for not accommodating a homogeneous group.

Like Robbins, Dearing linked the purpose of higher education with employment. The assumption underpinning this was that in becoming 'well-equipped for work' individuals would then be in a position to 'contribute effectively to society' (Dearing, 1997, p.72.). The purpose of focusing the expansion within higher education at 'sub-degree level' was to meet the perceived needs of the economy and those with more 'diverse aspirations' (Dearing, 1997, p. 100.). The idea underpinning this assumption was that non-traditional students such as some working class women have different aspirations to traditional students. The connection between sub-degree qualifications and the economic needs of the nation sounds superficially plausible. However, from the perspective of the working class women it is more likely that constrained choice and class and gender inequalities positioned them in relation to areas of the labour market defined by the same assumptions. The Labour government acknowledged the recommendation from Dearing that the expansion of higher education should be at sub-degree level through *Higher Education for the 21st Century* (DfEE, 1998a). The term sub-degree indicates that the qualification is at a lower level to that of a full traditional degree and suggests an element of inferiority. It also serves to remind traditional and non-traditional students that different classes require a different type of education. By 2000 funding was in place to support the introduction of the foundation degree (HEFCE, 2000). The aim of foundation degrees was to address a perceived shortfall in the numbers of people with 'intermediate higher technical and associate professional skills' (CHERI, 2011, p. 88.). Foundation degrees are a level 5 work-based learning degree which provides an alternative route into higher education for non 'traditional A-level school leavers' (HEFCE, 2007, p. 7.). The reasoning behind the introduction of the foundation degree was based on the perceived market demand and the understanding that foundation degrees would make studying in higher education affordable

and accessible and would appeal to those from lower socio-economic groups (Greenbank, 2006). In doing so foundation degrees were expected to widen participation within higher education and encourage lifelong learning (HEFCE, 2000a). Foundation degrees have increased the number of working class students within higher education. In 2004/2005 the growth of foundation degrees ‘contributed 1.3 per cent’ to the higher education participation rate (HEFCE, 2007, p. 7.). However, because they are aimed at particular groups of students, foundation degrees have had a limited effect on widening participation within higher education, this is a real dilemma. Testing out assumptions is useful but it can only be partial, it had to lead on to careful, informed consideration of what the actual effects of policy are on a particular group of people. This highlights the complexities and contradictions which emerge once the term widening participation is brought under scrutiny.

Both the Robbins and Dearing Reports recognised that widening participation would require an increase in the number of women participating within higher education (Robbins, 1963, p. 17, Dearing, 1997, p. 102.). In part this marks a recognition of the historic underrepresentation of women. However, it also highlights two assumptions; firstly, that the women who have not already entered higher education want to, and secondly, that these women have the means to do so. Although more women did participate in higher education following the Robbins Report this was less than anticipated. The Dearing Report signified a shift in focus from traditional to *non-traditional students* to encourage the participation of under-represented groups. Individuals from this group were referred to as ‘those from lower social economic groups’ (Dearing, 1997, p. 10.). Through this change in focus individuals were identified as *non-traditional, disadvantaged* and *lacking* aspiration and attainment, yet viewed as having potential to change (Dearing, 1997, p. 11.). This approach shows how widening participation policy can construct the identity of the individuals it targets.

Like Robbins, Dearing also examined and rejected the notion of ‘a pool of ability’ (Robbins, 1963, p. 49; Dearing, 1997, p. 101.). The idea that potential higher education students could be selected purely on merit set out in the Robbins Report was based on the idea that higher education should be available for those who are ‘qualified by the ability and attainment to pursue’ (Robbins, 1963, p.1.). This was reinforced in the Dearing Report’s suggestion that ideas that circulate in the government shape the thinking of successive governments and society as a whole. In viewing the notion of *merit* as a combination of ‘intelligence and effort’ Michael Young (2008, p. 84.) invented the term *meritocracy*. This term was introduced in his satire *The rise of the meritocracy* (Young, 1958, p. xii.) which saw IQ as the ‘sole determinant’ of position and opportunity within a future society (Ball, 2008, p. 179.). Difficulties arise when defining the term *merit* when considering that definitions are based on the assumptions and values particular groups hold. In 1997 Blair and his speech writers adopted the term *meritocracy* (Blair, 1997). It became central to widening participation policy strategy aiming to remove barriers and provide opportunity. An assumption underpinning the values of a meritocratic society is that those who have the potential and work hard can succeed in a democratic system. While this approach may account for the success of some individuals (Jones, 2011), the meritocratic approach is problematic as it overlooks the implications for the education system and the wider society based on social inequality in which those at the bottom are there as a result of lack of talent or laziness (Heywood, 1994). This is not a new idea. This typically *survival of the fittest* approach echoes the Robbins Report (Robbins, 1963) and the ‘everyone has the right to be unequal’ speech delivered by Margaret Thatcher supporting the assumption that society needs to have some ‘losers’ in order to be democratic (Thatcher, 1975). In this way a meritocratic system controlled by meritocrats makes it more possible for other meritocrats to succeed whilst keeping the majority of others, such as those from working class backgrounds out. The inequalities in education born from social circumstances such as class and gender are morally flawed as they permit

some students to start and continue in higher education in a better position while others face a continual flow of barriers (Heywood, 1994). The interpretation of *meritocracy* adopted by the Labour Government in the 1990s was in contrast to Young's (2008) original satirical intention. Taking the term *meritocracy* at face value suggests those who have either commented on or referred to it have accepted that this was the intended definition. A concept misinterpreted by ministers has the potential to strengthen implicit assumption within the government and to shape future policy. In this way the educational opportunities made available to particular groups such as working class women can also be misrecognised.

In 1984 both The National Advisory Body (NAB 1984a, 1984b) and the University Grants Committee (UGC 1984a, 1984b) produced strategy documents that emphasised the notions of merit and the *ability to benefit* from higher education. Conservative ministers responded with the Green Paper, the *Development of Higher Education into the 1990s* (DES, 1985). The notion of ability to benefit was accepted on the grounds that it would not be to the detriment of cost and standards (Wagner, 1989). The White paper, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge* (DES, 1987) developed the notion of access further by suggesting places should be available within higher education for those with the 'necessary qualities' to benefit rather than the necessary qualifications (DES, 1987, p. 7.). This paved the way for alternative routes into higher education such as diplomas, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and Access courses. In 1989 Kenneth Baker insisted the number of eighteen year olds participating in higher education doubled from 'fifteen per cent to thirty per cent' by 2015 (Baker, 1989). The intention was to increase the rate of participation in both traditional and non-traditional students (Wagner, 1989). Introduced at the end of the 1970s, Access courses gained recognition in the 1990s through the widening participation initiative. Perceived as one solution to increasing participation Access courses provided an alternative route into higher education. Access courses as with the foundation degree

continue to be an alternative route into higher education yet have failed to have the impact of increasing participation that the government anticipated (Burke, 2012). Dearing suggests that 'people respond to opportunities that are available to them' yet in providing access to a restricted choice an equality of educational opportunity is not achieved (Dearing, 1997, p. 101.). Both the Access and the foundation degree courses reinforce that education for non-traditional students tends to be different to that of traditional students.

3.5 The Future of Higher Education policy period (2003-2014)

The White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* set out the government's intentions to 'deal with student finance for the long term' to 'open up access to universities' and to allow universities in England to 'compete with the best' (DfES, 2003, p. 3.). This was in response to the national need to equip the 'labour force with appropriate and relevant skills, in stimulating innovation and supporting productivity and in enriching the quality of life' (DfES, 2003, p. 10.). An assumption underpinning *The Future of Higher Education* (as with the Robbins and Dearing Reports) was that a higher qualified workforce would enable the country to succeed in a 'fast-changing and increasingly competitive world' (DfES, 2003, p. 10.). This is a continuing and persistent theme.

The Future of Higher Education repeated the intention set out by Kenneth Baker in 1989 to increase participation for those aged between eighteen to thirty years old to fifty per cent by 2015. A shared view within the government was that the expansion of higher education should not replicate the Robbins model of increasing 'more of the same' traditional, young students (Dearing, 1997, p. 11, DfES, 2003, p. 60.). *The Future of Higher Education* set out the intention of widening participation policy to increase the number of non-traditional and also of mature students. In this way working class women were positioned as a specific target group. This intention was more likely to be in response to the reality that most of the

traditional students who were likely to go to university were already doing so and that the government were now focusing their widening participation campaign on recruiting a wider diversity of students. Any increase had to come from non-traditional groups because there was little scope to expand the numbers from groups who had become used to sending sons and daughters to university. Traditionally, those entering higher education aged eighteen or nineteen had been the largest group of students participating in UK universities. In the early 2000s the numbers of students over the age of twenty-one began to increase. Although *mature students* made up '54 per cent of all HE graduates' in 2010, young entrants remained a key focus of widening participation policy (HEFCE 2010). The target of fifty per cent of individuals under the age of thirty in some form of higher education by 2015 was to be largely met through two year vocational courses delivered in further education colleges (DfES, 2003, p. 57.). The assumption, which has been evident since Robbins, that different social classes require a different type of education, can be seen to have been reinvigorated by the introduction of the foundation degree. Having to make similar points about similar documents is a good indication of the continuing power of the assumptions I identify.

Foundation degrees were introduced in 2001 as a strategy to increase participation rates in higher education for non-traditional students in the eighteen to thirty years age group (DfEE 1998b, DfEE 1999). An assumption underpinning this move might have been that non-traditional students wanted to study a vocational sub-degree rather than a traditional three year honours degree. I argue instead that the student views were of less concern to the government than providing different types of education for different classes.

Foundation degrees were discussed in the 'Expanding higher education to meet our needs' chapter of *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003, p. 57.). Placing the discussion here rather than in the 'Fair access' chapter suggests that the purpose of foundation degrees was more to do with meeting the needs of the economy than equality of opportunity and

fair access. In this case it would be the views of employers rather than potential students that are the driving force behind change. The role of employers was in deciding what might be appropriate for these non traditional students. This differed from the influence they exerted over traditional students. In this way foundation degrees were sector endorsed and work placement focussed (Dearing, 1997). The assumptions underpinning widening participation policy highlighted within this thesis can all be linked to the overarching assumption that policy makers know who people from working class backgrounds are and the needs and wants they have so they have no need to worry about it in this context. In other words these assumptions are what my approach challenges.

In aiming to create both fair access within an expanding system and in setting out to 'maintain a minority of institutions as world class' (DfES, 2003), *The Future of Higher Education* had two sharply contrasting aspects in the concerns of widening participation while 'safeguarding the standards of traditional honours degrees' (DfES, 2003, p. 64.). This central concern of government was to *protect* traditional higher education for middle class students. In this way and in strengthening the implicit assumption that different classes require a different type of higher education, expanding higher education would lead to a drop in non traditional students attending traditional higher education (Burke, 2012). The rapid expansion of higher education in the 1990s led to suggestions from different quarters that increasing numbers of non-traditional students entering higher education would entail a lowering of standards. Such comments show that some vocational qualifications such as child care delivered in further education were viewed as inferior to others such as medicine delivered in a university.

Working class women studying higher education in further education colleges were marginalised through the constrained choices available to them. The quality of teaching and learning in polytechnics, colleges and universities has been documented as comparable

as a result of the quality assurance systems introduced (Education Corner 2016). It is however, difficult to compare systems/programmes that are different and is impossible without a shared inspectorate or common benchmarks. Competition between universities is reinforced when admission policies become more selective and request higher qualification grades. The phrase ‘expansion and differentiation’ describes the direction of change in higher education over the past thirty years (CHERI, 2011, p. 8.). Although the ‘attempted squeeze’ (Matheson, 2008, p. 284.) of higher education provision at the beginning of the 1980s resulted instead in a record increase of students numbers it should not be viewed as a success. Students denied a university place were able to take up a place within a polytechnic or college as universities became more selective, traditional students were more likely to have their application for university accepted than a non-traditional student. In this way a stratified and differentiated higher education system was reinforced.

Like Dearing the assumptions underlying the White paper recommendations tended to suggest a deficit model where individuals and institutions were blamed for lack of participation (Thomas and Jones, 2003). The academic approach to widening participation is underpinned by a deficit model which views those who are capable yet choose not to participate within higher education as lacking skills or possessing low aspiration (Jones and Thomas 2005, p. 17.). Government policy aimed to encourage participation within higher education by raising aspirations and by making information on courses, finance and support widely available (DfES 2006b, Milburn 2010). Both Robbins and Dearing rejected a deterministic theory of intelligence (Robbins, 1963, p. 253, Dearing, 1997, p. 101.). The assumption that the link between a child’s class of origin and their class of destination can be broken if the state invests to ensure the opportunity to become socially mobile continues to circulate within successive governments. The *Higher Education: Fair Access Challenge* report (SMCPC, 2013) views widening participation in terms of social mobility. In encouraging working class students to participate in higher education the government

assume the safeguarding of future generations is assured through social mobility yet the reality contradicts this. Almost seventy-five per cent of the six-million part-time workforce in Britain are women (TUC, 2014, p. 1.). In the North West of England 'at least a third of women working part time earn less than the living wage' of £7.60 an hour (TUC, 2014, p.1.). In this way part-time jobs affect 'women's pay and their career prospects far more than it does men' (TUC, 2014, p.1.). It follows from this data that most women are employed in low paid part-time work. An estimated seventy-five per cent of graduates, of whom most are now women, will never repay their loan in full (Bolton, 2014) as they will not earn over £21,000 a year (UCAS, 2014). Most women will not repay their loan because they work part time, indicating an added cost to the government for some participating within higher education. In this way the assumption underpinning contemporary policy of education for the purpose of improving the economy and society through social mobility is contradicted.

Despite a shortfall in skilled workers and concerns for the economy, the skills and qualifications of women remained under-utilised with many more women graduates accepting non-graduate employment compared with their male counterparts (Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger and Baumgarten, 2007). In 2012 forty seven per cent of graduates were employed in non-graduate roles (ONS, 2013a). At eighty nine per cent and eighty six per cent respectively, male and female graduate employment rates were similar (ONS, 2013a, p. 22.). However, female graduates were more likely to be employed in middle and lower skill roles such as teaching assistants and care and shop workers than men (ONS, 2013b). In 2013 twenty-seven per cent of female graduates compared with thirteen per cent of male graduates were employed in lower middle skilled work (ONS, 2013b, p. 1.). Female graduates were also more likely to work part time due to family commitments than men. In 2013 this was the case for thirty two per cent of female graduates compared to just eight per cent of men (ONS, 2013a, p. 24.). This indicates that there are other reasons why

some women remain in low paid part time work despite having gained a higher qualification.

The Future of Higher Education reiterated the government's commitment to raising aspirations through the introduction of pre-entry support such as Aimhigher (DfES, 2004a). The emphasis of this programme was on attracting the perceived gifted and talented individuals from working class backgrounds in order to encourage them to apply for university. In using class the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP, 2003) 'felt that the government wrongly assumes that all students want to attend elite institutions' (Greenbank, 2006, p. 154.). In initiatives such as Aimhigher singling out particular students within a group the notion that intelligence and ability is set, 'definable and measurable' is reinforced (Ball, 2008, p. 180.).

It became 'customary' (Bowl, 2003, p. 5.) within education to use the concept *non-traditional student* to refer to adult students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Robbins, 1963, Dearing 1997, DfES, 2003, HEFCE, 2007, DBIS, 2014.). To categorise people by social class in a meritocratic society is self-contradictory. By introducing a proxy for class in the term 'non-traditional' the government are still able to identify and target a particular group of higher education student. In changing the term entrenched ideas circulating within the government can remain unchallenged. Widening participation policy constructs the identity of the individuals it targets. Providing a definition of non-traditional student identifies the minority group that widening participation policy aims to encourage into higher education. The document *Participation of Non-traditional Students in Higher Education* (HEFCE, 2007) defines *non-traditional student* as possessing at least one of the following characteristics:

 'From an ethnic minority group

 Have a long-term disability

Possessed non-standard qualifications on entry to higher education

Were from lower-socio-economic groups of origin' (HEFCE, 2007, p. 45.).

Providing a definition of non-traditional student identifies the minority group that widening participation policy aims to encourage into higher education. It also identifies those who widening participation policy excludes, those white, young, middle class individuals without a disability who have A levels. This is a small group of people by comparison. In the shift from elite to mass higher education it is the non-traditional students who epitomise the masses. In this way these students are 'homogenized, pathologized and marked as other' (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003, p. 599.). In comparison the smaller number of traditional students are recognised as there 'as of right, representing the norm against which the others are judged and may be found wanting' (Webb, 1997, p. 68.). The control and dominant influence of the government and middle classes over other social groups suggests a hegemonic discourse (Gramsci, 1971) underpinning widening participation policy. This begins to show how as programme leader for the foundation degree I am working with the competing forces and paradoxes that are set up through a hegemonic education system. This has implications for my study as in the government viewing students with A-levels entry requirements as the norm it is the students with vocational entry qualifications and more specific practical experience that are viewed as *other*. The term *non-traditional* has the effect of labelling students as different. As a result institutions tend to make assumptions about individuals and groups. These can develop into perceived expectations. In using blanket terms to define who is under-represented in higher education subtle differences within gender, class and between individuals are missed.

3.6 Working class women's experience of participation in further and higher education

The following section explores some of the extensive literature on working class women's participation in further and higher education in order to situate this research and to identify the gaps which the research seeks to address. In this respect the work of authors including Quinn (2004a), Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010), Brine (2013) and Archer (2014) is of central importance. The importance stems from the fact that these authors all explicitly address the assumptions that they argue underpin widening participation policy. Thus this literature provides a potential comparison to the policy themes that the research finds. A comparison of the themes found in policy and in literature makes possible a consideration of the different ways in which working class women are represented within higher education.

One of the most apparent differences concerns the significance of individual aspiration. In contrast to the enduring policy assumption that low aspiration is a key component for low participation rates in higher education (DfEE 1998, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011), educational research is more critical of the value of aspiration as an explanatory factor. Such research tends not to call for young people to 'aim higher' as suggested in policy (see DfES, 2000a) while research carried out into the aspirations of twelve to fifteen year olds living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods suggested that young people and their families 'generally appear to aspire highly' and in this way can be considered 'part of an ambitious generation' (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014, p. 76.). This highlights how research findings differ from assumptions found in policy, for example, that 'poor places equal low aspirations' which was noted by Kintrea, St Claire and Houston (2015, p. 679.). This is important because a focus on aspiration often leads to the role played by wider factors being ignored. The opportunity to ignore these wider factors may well contribute to its survival in policy. Yet such a recognition is argued (Burke 2012) to be a necessary pre-

condition for the ending of inequalities. Educational research adopts a much more nuanced picture of aspiration which acknowledges that the mobilisation of social, economic and cultural resources increases the likelihood of aspirations becoming reality (Devine 2004). In contrast, families that are supportive, only to the extent of adopting an as long as they are happy approach without ‘engaging in the active fostering of aspirations via the deployment of capital’ (Archer, DeWitt, and Wong, 2014, p. 72.) may not ‘provide young people with the navigational capacity to aspire’ (Strand and Winston, 2008, p. 266.). Those from working class backgrounds remain under-represented within higher education (DfEE 1998, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011), despite this young people in general believe that their ‘own efforts will determine personal outcome’ (Croll, 2008, p. 251.) and express an aspiration to ‘stay on at school and go to university’ (Kintrea, St Claire and Houston 2015, p. 679.). Such educational research suggests that it is not low aspiration *per se* that prevents working class individuals from participating within higher education (Greenbank 2009, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, Archer, DeWitt, and Wong, 2014, Kintrea, St Clair and Houston, 2015). What is more likely is that some individuals are ‘less confident’ in the likelihood of success (Archer, DeWitt, and Wong, 2014, p. 76.). Rather than possessing a fatalistic sense of pessimism about their future (Purcell, Morley and Rowley, 2002) working class individuals tend to have a more realistic attitude to life (Greenbank, 2009). In this way calling for young people to ‘aim higher’ (DfES, 2004a) is ‘not likely to be enough to overcome disadvantage’ (Kintrea, St Claire and Houston 2015, p. 681.). Feelings of historical powerlessness and of being less able to influence the course of their lives are also evident for some, ‘perhaps reflecting contemporary labour market uncertainties and global recession’ (Archer, DeWitt, and Wong, 2014, p. 76.). Such factors tend to be absent in policy which reflects the assumption that the source of the low participation rates in higher education problem is essentially that working class people lack aspiration. In contrast educational research argues that those from working class

backgrounds do have aspirations but that these are shaped in various ways which then impact on participation within higher education.

Young people from working class backgrounds are 'less likely to aspire to follow in family member's footsteps' into skilled manual and unskilled manual work possibly as a result of seeing the struggle their families have endured (Archer, DeWitt, and Wong, 2014, p. 77.). This contrasts with young people from middle class families who tend to follow the career path of their middle class parents. The lack of such parentally trodden paths could be another aspect which makes it harder for those from working class backgrounds to realise their aspirations. The influence of the family, especially the mother, is prominent in educational research literature which highlights how mothers support particular constructions of what is possible. It is not that the 'daughter is condemned to become or mimic the mother' rather that she communicates strong positive and negative messages about learning and knowledge (Quinn, 2004a, p. 377.) The role often played by mothers in signifying the 'limit of what can be known' has obvious importance when it comes to negotiating access to educational opportunities (Quinn, 2004a, p. 369.). For some working class women the memories they have of their mothers are stories of educational disadvantage, escape and of wanting to leave the past behind. Such stories motivate these women into attempting to change their current situation suggesting that while working class women are aware of some inequality within education having this awareness and possessing future aspiration is not enough to increase the participation rate of working class women within higher education.

Working class women continue to display distinctive patterns of participation in higher education. They are under-represented within elite universities, the success stories of the few who do succeed have had 'little impact on the broader picture of continuing' classed inequalities (Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010, p. 121.). Working class students (both men

and women) are more likely to have aspirations of attending post 1992 universities than their middle class counterparts who tend to prefer to study with people from a similar background (Bourdieu 1990) who experience a less marked lack of entitlement to study at an elite university (Reay, Crozier, Clayton 2010). The majority of working class students highlight a 'combination of location and financial reasons' for choosing to study locally due to work and family constraints (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, p. 111.). How working class students view themselves and are viewed by others in terms of their learner and class identities is influenced by the educational institution where they study. Studying higher education in further education emphasises a 'primary sense of identification as local, working class and at college' serving only to reinforce their identity as other (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, p. 115.). A range of factors including the costs of higher education, the juggling of work, family and university and the attendant psycho-social pressures are highlighted within education research (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010). That working class students run the risk of being defined by their commitments as workers and family members rather than by their ability has further implications for how educational aspiration should be understood.

Despite working class students often being the 'most motivated and successful of students' (Quinn, 2004, p.64.) the higher education institutes with the best records of promoting widening participation also tend to have the lowest retention rates (HEFCE, 2006). This is an issue because the creation of what are seen as easier access routes is sometimes perceived by higher education institutions as the explanation of higher dropout rates. That some individuals from working class backgrounds fail to complete their studies, adds to the continued under-representation of successful working class students in higher education. The extent of working class drop out makes it possible to construct a narrative around aspiration that outlines how such students are unable to cope with the demands of higher level study and which ignores the influences of wider factors and can be interpreted instead

in terms of individual deficiency (Jones and Thomas 2005). It also makes it possible to overlook research which consistently argues that drop out amongst working class students has 'very little to do with academic ability' (Quinn, 2004, p. 67.). It is important to understand drop-out as a 'cultural narrative that has an element of self-fulfilling prophecy' (Quinn, 2004, p. 63.) as it suggests that there are wider factors than just aspiration that impact on higher education participation.

Educational research offers a range of explanations which explain working class drop out in higher education. It is useful to consider discussion about working class retention because this underscores the inadequacy of an aspiration based policy approach. Many parents with working class backgrounds wish their children to study at university in spite of fears that this may result in them deserting the family and its norms and values (Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010). Although entering higher education is often still a cause for celebration for many first generation entrants this can 'create a burden of responsibility' in family expectations, debt and in juggling part time work (Quinn, 2004, p. 67.). Working class women are more likely to have fragile and less confident learner identities than their male and middle-class counterparts (Leathwood and Read 2008). A compounding sense of self-doubt and belief that they did not really deserve to be studying higher education can weigh heavily on these students. A lack of confidence, confusion and a sense of failure is engrained in many working class students once they enter university (Quinn, 2004) and a sense of self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates the likelihood of failure that some universities expect (Skeggs, 1997). Despite the role of schools being viewed as to prepare for future employment or study (Strand and Winston 2008) an undermining and negative school experience is offered as an explanation for learning identities that are 'more conflicted and unconfident' within working class individuals (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, p. 120.). Research carried out across three universities and a college of further education challenges the view that working class students within higher education are high risk, problematic and

deficient instead capturing the 'success, resilience and fortitude' of a diverse range of working class students studying for a foundation degree (Crozier and Reay, 2011, p. 145.). Students were more likely to drop out of higher education if they felt unprepared for the experience. Learning in some higher education provision was viewed as poorly framed. In less effective provision attendance at lectures was not compulsory, supervision tutorials were sparse, feedback was irregular and students were expected to work more independently despite receiving satisfactory supervision and guidance. Although often associated with progressive education and intended as a supportive approach, weak framing results in institutions that encourages a lack of engagement and deepens confusion rather than promotes freedom and creativity. Educational research calls for strong framing with tighter institutional control in order to provide a clearer direction and more informative and supportive structure for unprepared working class students (Bernstein 2000, Crozier and Reay 2011). The issue with this solution is that working class students are still viewed as deficient and are placed in a position of dependency.

As programme leader it is important for me to be able to grasp the subtleties within the aspiration narrative in order to be able to work effectively with the women studying on the foundation degree at Ramsbridge College. I am interested to find out what has influenced the lives of the women in my participant group and how this has impacted on their educational path in order to have a better understanding of the wider factors that support the realisation of aspiration. I need to use the research to critique the simplistic assumptions within widening participation policy. My study will inform my understanding of the wider factors that influence the decision to participate within higher education and those that impact upon the experience.

The attachment to low aspiration has remained constant within widening participation policy despite repeated critiques (Thomas 2001; Archer and Hutchings and Ross 2003;

Quinn 2004; Archer and Francis 2007; Croll 2008; Strand and Winston 2008; Kintrea, St Clair and Houston 2011, Burke 2012). Contrary to widening participation policy 'there is no widespread poverty of aspiration' (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014, p. 77.).

Educational research calls for a reassessment of attempts to raise aspirations and a stronger emphasis on informing and diversifying aspirations in a bid to ensure that young working class individuals can 'find routes to achieve interesting and fulfilling well paid jobs' (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014, p. 77.). More subtly the topic of how aspirations are shaped in relation to gender, class and place needs to be explored if students are to be supported more effectively within higher education in the future (Kintrea, St Claire and Houston, 2015). There is a gap in the educational literature as to what an effective educational experience might look like in practice. My study will explore the tensions between policy and educational research and see how it plays out in practice in the particular context of Ramsbridge College.

3.7 Summary and conclusion

An examination of key documents shows that low aspiration has remained a key component in official explanations for low participation rates in higher education (DfEE 1998, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011). Yet in basing lack of aspiration or low aspiration on a notion of individual deficit, widening participation policy is unable to ensure equality of opportunity. In recognising the concept of low aspiration instead in terms of 'social conditions, discourses and practices' (Burke, 2012, p. 142.) the complex nature of power and inequality can be tackled. Aspiration is not a straight forward expression of desire rather it is interwoven with access to provision and particular forms of knowledge and identity. Recognition of what it means to be a motivated student is subject to social practices. The notion of barriers is unable to realistically address such complexities. In this

way the ‘complicated processes by which inequalities are reproduced and ultimately the right to higher education denied’ are masked by such complexities (Burke, 2012, p. 142.).

The underlying concerns of the Robbins and Dearing Report and more recently *The Future of Higher Education* about providing disadvantaged students with access to higher education ‘remain a major policy issue’ (Vignoles and Crawford, 2010, p. 47.). David Cameron suggests working class people ‘do not get ahead in life partly because they have low aspirations’ and recommends help ‘to get them to think that they can get all the way to the top’ (Dominiczak, 2013, p. 1.).

The two initial research questions of *what has led to the introduction of the foundation degree?* and *what factors shape the perception of education that some working class women studying on a foundation degree in a further education college have?* were developed to help me focus the literature I was reviewing.

Following the completion of the literature review I was able to clarify and refine my research (Burgess et al, 2006). More subtle research questions were created as a result. These research questions are:

1. How do the women’s experiences of education reflect and challenge the assumptions underpinning widening participation policy?
2. To what extent can the women’s experiences of education be explained by place?
3. How can the women’s experiences of education shape practice in a further education college?

The government have a responsibility to working class women to ensure that debates about pedagogy are ‘informed, critical and open’ to ensure an equality of educational opportunity

(Coffield and Williamson, 1997, p. 5.). In doing so working class women living in a deprived industrial town would experience the choices encountered by middle class students living in more affluent and accessible areas of the country. In reviewing policy and some literature I suggest that particular explicit and implicit assumptions about working class women who study at higher education level in further education appear to continue to underpin widening participation policy. The complexity of place tends to be a factor that is not considered by the government and hence not reflected in widening participation policy. Of particular interest to my study is the explicit assumption that non-traditional students such as working class women have low aspirations.

Assumptions informing widening participation policy tend to position non-traditional students generally and working class students in particular, in specific ways. This is also recognised to some extent in literature. I am seeking to suggest that these assumptions are misleading in important ways and that there are implications for practice. If working class women are misrecognised within society by those who influence policy decisions then inequalities of social class and gender will also be reflected within educational practice. In order to make the research methodology congruent with these findings I have chosen a methodological framework to underpin my study. This is presented in the following chapter and reflects on the processes by which the chosen research design was established to support a systematic study. This is based on the central theme of how working class women are mis/recognised within higher education policy literature and is supported by the three revised research questions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter presents the methodological framework that underpins my study. It reflects on the process by which the chosen research design was established to support a systematic study based on three main research questions. It begins by clarifying the focus and approach of my research and justifies the use of the participant group chosen. It also provides a rationale for the data collection methods selected and sets out the strategies determined for data analysis. It sets out the boundaries. It also critiques the shortcomings and limitations of my methods and the issues raised by the methodology.

4.2 Research focus

My study focuses on widening participation within higher education and the assumptions made in it by governments about non-traditional students such as working class women. A recurring theme in widening participation policy is that working class students have low aspirations (DfEE 1998, Francis 2006, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011.). My study is motivated by the disparities in participation rates between lower and higher socio-economic groups and by a desire to critique the assumptions inherent in policy discourses that suggest students within these distinct groups approach studying in higher education differently.

The first aim of my study is to analyse the stories the women tell about their experiences of education and studying on the foundation degree. This enables me to compare my interpretation of their stories with the assumptions that underpin policy and informs my understanding of the experiences non-traditional students have of higher education and how they both reflect and challenge the widening participation agenda.

The second aim of my study is to evaluate the impact of living in Ramsbridge and studying in Ramsbridge College on the women's experiences of education. Doing this makes it possible for me to judge whether the implicit and explicit assumptions made within widening participation policy about location are justified. This will inform my view of how location can impact on higher education study.

The third aim of my study is to draw on the stories the women tell of their experiences of studying at Ramsbridge College and my own experience of teaching and learning to determine the extent of how pedagogy is challenging policy shaped practice. I will then propose how teaching and learning can be changed to develop practice informed by widening participation discourse.

At the heart of my research are the stories that four women on the foundation degree tell about their lives. Essentially I want to explore the factors that have led these women to study for a foundation degree at Ramsbridge College and how the assumptions behind widening participation policy interact with location of the college to influence how they see their own learning.

4.3 Revised research questions

The phrasing of my research questions was important as they informed the questions I asked the women during interview (Braun and Clarke, 2013). I paid attention to key words to ensure they were not misunderstood. This was vital as there is a long history of mis/recognition which I did not want to add to. Chapter 3 provides a rationale for my research questions. My research questions are:

1. How do the women's experiences of education reflect and challenge the assumptions underpinning widening participation policy?

2. To what extent can the women's experiences of education be explained by place?
3. How can the women's experiences of education shape practice in a further education college?

4.4 Rationale for focus on one cohort of a particular foundation degree

The foundation degree at Ramsbridge College is predominately studied by women from working class backgrounds. The women in my study were over the age of twenty-five on starting the foundation degree, did not have the standard university entry requirements of A' levels and came from a working class background. In this way the women in my study exemplify *non-traditional* as defined by HEFCE (2007) and belong to one of the groups targeted by the government in the aim to widen participation within higher education (Dearing, 1997).

Exploring the stories of both male and female foundation degree students within Ramsbridge College would have provided a comparison of perspectives and a broader sense of student views. Exploring the stories of other women studying for a different foundation degree within the college would also have provided this yet ultimately I was most interested in the students I know in my role as programme leader for the foundation degree. Analysing the stories these women tell about their experiences of education and studying on the foundation degree means that I can suggest how teaching and learning can be adapted and developed. Relevant strategies and techniques viewed as transferable can be piloted within the department and within the wider context of Ramsbridge College. The decision to have four women as the focus of my research was made for two reasons. Firstly the interviews conducted with the women produced rich and powerful data that needed to be central to the research. Secondly having come to know the women well I doubt that I could have gained any clearer understanding by having a larger participant group of foundation degree students. This was reinforced when I conducted focus group

sessions with six other women from the 2011/2012 cohort in order to authenticate some of the themes within the stories the four women told. Although viewed as a limitation by some (Charmaz, 2006) a large participant group is not necessary for a study to be successful (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

4.5 Rationale for the choice of research approach

The aim of my research is to use the stories of four women studying in Ramsbridge College to explore the implications of the provision of higher education in further education with a particular focus on foundation degrees in the aim to improve recruitment and on course support within the college in the future. A range of responses were anticipated as experiences of learning are diverse, individualised and ‘influenced’ by the environment (Rogers, 2007, p.12.). I decided this would be best captured by adopting a qualitative approach.

In reading *Narratives and Fictions in Education Research* (Clough, 2002) I became interested in the narrative line of inquiry where participants tell their life story of learning. This approach has grown in acceptance and popularity (Clough, 2002) and is viewed as a valuable source of data (Bell, 2005). Gray (1998) views this method as most suitable when depicting ‘intensely personal accounts’ while Clough (2002, p. 1.) maintains storytelling is a natural means of making ‘sense of lives’. This informed my thinking of the approach to take with my own study. I decided not to take a specifically Clough (2002) inspired narrative approach because I did not want to intentionally add to the long history of misrecognition. Although I am aware that in analysing the women’s stories I interpret them in relation to my own experiences I did not want to ‘draw on the events of lived experience to create fictional stories’ (Clough, 2002, p. 9.).

My study sits within a grounded theory methodology as it is grounded in the data it has generated. This approach required me to engage in my research with an open mind and seeking detail which is specific to a particular environment as opposed to 'statistical representativeness' (Bartlett and Burton 2007, p. 38.). My research however, is not specifically grounded theory. A traditional grounded theory approach does not examine literature before data collection begins in order to enable theory to emerge from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 2009). I conducted a review of literature before data collection began in order to locate some of the assumptions I thought might be made about working class women studying higher education in further education and I continued to review literature throughout my study. In this way I came to my study with shaped ideas about how non-traditional students such as working class women are perceived as a result of the assumptions made within widening participation policy. I suggest being immersed in any literature means that all researchers bring some preconceived ideas to their study and furthermore, it is this that acts as the basis of the developing a critical stance.

Conducting research focusing on a particular town, the further education college within it and four women studying for a foundation degree suggests a case study approach to my study. This is 'ideally suited' to the requirements of a small scale researcher like myself, enabling me capture the unique characteristics of 'one case in depth' (Bartlett and Burton 2007, p. 47.). The case study approach provides 'evidence to support' claims being made and favours a range of data collection methods (Burgess et al 2006, p. 5.). This approach generates the detail required to produce a 'feeling' for a particular environment (Bartlett and Burton 2007, p. 46.). In this way there is a connection between my research focus, the methodology of case study and myself. Becoming a reflexive researcher has provided 'emotional insight' where I continue to draw parallels between myself and the women (Moon, 2008, p. 72.).

Coming from a working class background I have also in the past made the decision to continue in education and to go on to study at a higher level. I also work at Ramsbridge College where the women are studying. Making connections with the women has enabled me to place myself within the subject area and to contextualise my research focus. In analysing the women's stories in order to 'understand the individual life within its social context' I am involved in biographical research (Roberts, 2002, p. 12.). In this way my research sits within an interpretivist paradigm and in 'understanding people's subjective experiences' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 334.) it sits within the social perspective of phenomenography where a person's perception of an experience is viewed as unique and as determining how they will react in a situation (Bartlett and Burton 2007). This is supported by the grounded theory approach that views research as part of the person who is conducting it (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Exploring these concepts has informed my thinking about my own research and how I am compelled to find out more about what has led the students to be studying in the college and if place impacts on their stories in order to understand more about my personal and professional practice. The specific aim of my research is to inform future practice within the foundation degree within Ramsbridge College yet it can also inform future practice across the college and the further education colleges across the foundation degree partnership.

In conducting my research with the aim to inform future practice, I am engaging 'with women and for women' (Goodley et al, 2004, p. 116.) so the voices of a particular under-represented group of working class women can 'emerge' and be heard (Burgess et al 2006, p. 75.). This is important if the ideals of a patriarchal society are to be confronted and the emancipation of women is to be furthered. In this way my research supports a voice relational approach (Brown and Gilligan, 1992) with its roots in a 'long feminist tradition' (Goodley et al, 2004, p. 116.). Although grounded in the stories that the women tell about their experiences and the relationships within it my research however is not specifically a

voice relational approach. A traditional approach is based on collaboration where participants are involved in all stages of analysis and in discussions on how the process of analysis impacts upon data. In this way participants have an agentic voice which enables them to be both producer and product of the analysis (Goodley et al, 2004.). I chose not to take a collaborative approach to my research for two reasons, firstly time constraints did not allow for such a high level of involvement from the women and secondly, the focus of my research is to test some of the assumptions made within widening participation policy about working class women studying higher education in further education.

4.6 Rationale for the choice of data collection methods

Exploring methodological literature highlights a range of data collection methods such as structured interviews and questionnaires. At the start of my research I anticipated that I would hear a range of responses from the women. A qualitative approach was decided upon, rather than a quantitative approach in the form of a questionnaire, for example. The data collection methods chosen support an 'inductive' approach (Burgess et al, 2006, p. 47.) and reflect the ideals of classic grounded theory where all participant related information is viewed as potential data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967.).

A range of methods was used to collect data. These were semi-structured interview, biography and focus group. Using multi-methods generates an increase in and different types of data on the same subject (Braun and Clarke, 2013). As a tool to 'cross-check' findings (Bell, 2005, p. 116.) triangulation (Wisker, 2001) can be viewed as a way of 'improving the quality' of a study (Denscombe, 2005, p. 132.). Two focus group sessions supported the data gathered from the four main women within my study. These sessions were conducted to authenticate some of the themes within the stories the four women told (Morgan, 1997).

4.7 Participant recruitment

I asked all year one of cohort 2011/2012 foundation degree students if they would participate in my research, I was pleased when all seventeen women volunteered. Such a high consent rate could be interpreted positively in terms of the relationship I have with my students. It could also be attributed to an unequal relationship between myself as programme leader and the women as my students. In order to alleviate a Hawthorne type effect where the students change their behaviour as a result of being in the spotlight, the role of the participant and the parameters regarding consent were made explicit (Adair, 1984). The first four interviews to be negotiated following this initial information giving session enabled me to recruit my four main participants. This was an effective way to choose the participant group because as I got to know the 2011/2012 cohort of students better I realised that they all had valuable stories to tell about their journey through education and any combination of women would have produced rich data. The motives of some participants and their willingness to be involved in research will always raise questions of narcissism where personal interest and gain are the focus (Etherington, 2004, p. 227.). Being reflexive and aware of the possible biases of both myself and of my participants enabled me to conduct research in a sensitive and transparent manner. The participant selection process was conducted as a whole group activity. I wanted to make the selection process as open as possible. In making the initial opportunity to participate available to all the women I was avoiding inadvertently selecting students because of the qualities I thought they would bring to my research. This approach carried the risk of a *groupthink* situation where a close knit group protect their unanimity by collectively making a decision (Janis, 1972). The risk for my research was that none of the women would volunteer; fortunately this was not the case. The fact that all of the women volunteered could suggest that a groupthink mindset was evident. The next part of the selection process addressed this. Interviews with the women were mutually negotiated. Due to available dates and timings the first four interviews arranged were not with the first

four women to put themselves forward thus addressing possible concerns regarding narcissism.

4.8 Interview design

For each of the women data collection began with an initial semi-structured interview. This gave the women the freedom to incorporate topics of conversation important to them and to 'connect with their own individual and unique experiences' (Burgess et al, 2006, p. 73.). Tightly controlled structured interview questions in comparison were less likely to reveal information that I had not previously considered. Before the start of each interview I reiterated key points such as the purpose of my research and the right for the women to decline answering a question or to abandon the interview at any point within it if they choose.

Poorly developed interview questions can 'damage rapport and subsequent data collection' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 84.). With this in mind I prepared one pre-set question for each of the first interviews. The question, "*...tell me a little bit about yourself and your background*" (BI1P1L3) was developed for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was open to encourage the women to provide detail rather than a one word answer. Secondly, it provided the opportunity for each of the women to choose the starting point and the direction of the conversation, in this way it was hoped the women would be put at ease. In being neutral the question did not influence the story each woman was to tell me. Initial questions should be 'less probing, sensitive and direct later questions' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 84.).

Follow up interviews were also conducted. This provided an opportunity for responses from initial interviews to be clarified or to seek additional information in order to fill any gaps in data. Some questions, such as "*the first area I wanted to clarify with you was...*"

(BI5P1L1) were used to open a follow up interview. In this case questions were pre-set.

The majority of pre-set questions, such as, *“you said last time that you’d seen your mum work and study...how big an influence has your mum been in...your education?”*

(CI3P2L49), were asked when the relevant topic came up naturally during interview. This ensured that the flow of conversation was not interrupted and that the participant did not feel uncomfortable due to the pressure of feeling tested. Before each follow up interview I asked the women *“do you want to comment on or change anything from the previous interview?”* I had to take into consideration that the women may take this opportunity to rework or polish their story yet I viewed this approach as a way to develop trust between myself as interviewer and the women as participants. None of the women used this opportunity to change their story but there were many occasions when they would say, for example, *“I was thinking about this, this morning...”* (DI3P2L10). This implies that the women were reflecting on the conversations we had during interview in order to make sense of their past and present experiences. In this way being involved in my research was opening up unintended spaces for the women.

A narrative approach to research encourages participants to share their story in ‘continuous prose or following a question and answer sequence’ (Wisker, 200, p. 196.). It was paramount that the limited number of questions I did ask were ones that the women were willing and able to answer to avoid misinterpretation or withdrawal from the research due to feeling under pressure. This was achieved by asking short, open-ended and ‘unambiguous’ questions which did not make assumptions, put ‘words’ into the participants’ mouths or distracted the women from their train of thought (Allison et al, 1996, p. 103.).

A crucial consideration of conducting the interviews was to allow each of the women to talk freely but to keep the discussion within the parameter of the research focus and to

ensure all themes had been addressed. This was to ensure that the interviews were conducted in an efficient manner as a way to encourage the women to participate in follow up sessions.

The decision to record all interviews on to a digital voice recorder was made for a number of reasons. Firstly I am unable to take shorthand therefore I would be unable to keep up with the responses made by the women using longhand. Secondly I felt that the women would be distracted by note-taking during the interview and therefore would be self conscious and less likely to respond.

When conducting interviews Davies et al (1994) shared personal experiences of being a mature student with participants believing it to be essential to 'reduce the exploitative power balance between researcher and subject' (Davies et al 1994, p. 166.). In contrast I chose not share my personal experiences with the women in my study in order to reduce the likelihood of the women changing their views in response to what I said. In analysing the stories that the women tell about their experiences of education and studying on the foundation degree I can compare my interpretation of their stories with the assumptions suggested within widening participation policy. In this way I can make sense of their lives and of why as programme leader for the foundation degree I approach teaching and learning in a particular way. Being a woman interviewing women (Davies, 1994) is not enough but coming from a similar background and achieving academically may go some way towards addressing the imbalance. Even so I remain in the position of programme leader and as tutor to the women. This makes some imbalance unavoidable however it is this imbalance that has enabled me to be in the position to be able to conduct my study.

4.9 Pilot study

It was important to plan carefully in order to ‘make the most’ of the pilot study (Burgess et al, 2006, p. 78.). This enabled me to test for example, the data collection methods I proposed to use and to practice my interviewing technique. It gave me a new view of my research.

The interviews I conducted during the pilot study were delivered as a preset question and answer session which did not stray from a tight script. In practice these sessions were awkward and on reflection there were many missed opportunities to engage fully with the stories the participants were telling or to pick up on a particular theme in order to explore it further. At the time I saw this format as a way to ensure that I did not influence the responses that the participants gave. On further engagement with methodological literature and reflection on action (Schön, 1983) it became evident that this was unavoidable as the conduct of the researcher ‘inevitably’ affects the language and behaviour of the participants (Denscombe, 2005, p. 268.). The dialogue of personal experience is bound in the ‘social contexts which it is represented’ (Usher, 1997, p. 89.) and therefore is open to interpretation because of its very nature creating the term of ‘the observer’s paradox’ (Labov, 1970, p. 250.). Awareness of this phenomenon was important and a concern shared by Cohen (2007), yet Kvale (1996, p. 244.) argues that interviews should be viewed as ‘dialogues’ where participant and researcher contribute to the responses recorded. The latter view reflects the grounded theory approach where participants are supported in order to tell their own stories and the approach I took to conducting interviewing following my pilot study. Adopting a participant led approach resulted in less staged interviews and provided a more relaxed atmosphere, enabling a more diverse range of threads to be explored. The length of each interview was noted. In doing so I was able to provide future interviewees with an approximate time to set aside and I could estimate how long it would take me to collect my data.

The use of a digital voice recorder can hinder the quality of an interview if it causes a participant to react in an unnatural way. This was the case during my pilot study when the 'visual appearance' reminded a foundation degree student she was being recorded (Denscombe, 2003, p. 177.). Nervous laughter and forgetting basic information such as the name and level of the course she had studied showed that this participant was initially flustered. Early on in the interview she pointed at the digital voice recorder stating "*it's that thing!*" however, following some supportive words the student's initial self consciousness subsided and the interview was able to continue in a more relaxed manner. As a result of this experience the digital voice recorder was placed out of the participant's direct field of vision in subsequent interviews.

Conducting the pilot study was an important part of the research process and one that could not be underestimated (Burgess et al, 2006). Information gathered during this phase and reflection upon it informed the design of my study, indicating a need to revisit my plan and to clarify intentions of my research. Further reading and examination of methodological literature at this time reassured me that scaling down my participant group in order to research a more specific topic area which I had more of an interest in was appropriate.

4.10 Individual interviews

A small meeting room was booked within Ramsbridge College to enable uninterrupted interview sessions to take place throughout the data collection phase of my research.

Interviews were organised into a pre-arranged schedule (see appendix 5). One and a half hours was allocated for each session which included time to reiterate the purpose of my research and to obtain consent from the participant as well as for the interview itself.

Recording equipment was checked for good repair prior to each data collection session and new batteries were installed on a regular basis. Problems can arise as a result of excessive background noise (The Open University, 2001) or if the participant's voice is not picked

up by the recorder, however, this did not occur during my data collection sessions. The record quality of the digital voice recorder I used was excellent and background noise in the corridor was at a minimum due to the location of the meeting room, making the task of transcription less problematic.

In order for the interview sessions to be successful it was important to create an environment that was non-threatening and held as few distractions as possible. Although interviews were recorded hand written notes were not taken as this was viewed as a further distraction for the participant. Each interview was structured 'around natural conversation' and style was adapted to reflect the individual (Davies et al, 1994, p. 166.). Each participant was guided to focus on particular topics and I made a conscious effort to interrupt as little as possible enable the women's own experiences and views to emerge. A general, often unrelated opening question such as "*how are the new intake settling in?*" was asked off tape to put the woman at ease, this was then followed with a general question to start such as, "*You have nearly finished the foundation degree, tell me about your experience of the second year*" (CI4P1L1).

It is important to appreciate the value of both interviewer and participant silence. In delaying my response the women often expanded on what they had already said and provided more detail (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 136.). In remaining silent I effectively gave the women 'permission to continue' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 96.) however silence could be interpreted in a different way. Often what the women did not say was more revealing than the words they spoke; in these cases I would interpret body language, a shake of the head, a sigh or a break in eye contact.

4.11 Focus group

In line with a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) I was aware that my research was 'constantly evolving' yet wondered how much data I should collect (Wisker, 2001, p. 188.). The concept of saturation helped to inform my practice (Bowen, 2008).

Developed from a grounded theory approach, the concept of saturation refers to the 'point when additional data fails to generate new information' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 55.).

A focus group was conducted in order to test some of the views that had been raised during the individual interviews (Morgan, 1997), in this way my research was able to reach a point of 'saturation' (Wisker, 2001, p. 188.).

Focus group sessions are an effective method of gathering data because a variety of responses can be collected from a number of participants within a short timeframe. In this way focus group sessions are an economical use of a researcher's time. Focus group sessions also provide the opportunity for 'jointly constructed' responses (Hutchings and Archer, 2001, p. 72.). Although this can result in insights that would not have arisen during a one to one session focus group sessions can encourage group think and discourage individual participants from upholding their own opinion (Janis, 1972).

At the beginning of the research all seventeen of the first years in the 2011/2012 cohort had volunteered to participate in my research. One year later it was important not to assume that these women were still willing. I spoke with the remaining women on the foundation degree prior to the focus group session in order to renegotiate access (Millar, 1998). I reiterated the broad aim of my research, the level of involvement required of them and for an indication of continued willingness to participate. As a result of work commitments, childcare difficulties and sickness just four of these eight were able to attend the focus group session. These eight women had characteristics in common with the four women who became the focus of my research for example they too were mothers, one lived within

a deprived ward of the town and three had an immediate family member with a disability or a husband/partner with poor health.

Reflecting on this focus group session I could not avoid questioning how representative this group was of the 2011/2012 cohort of foundation degree students as a whole as it had not included the younger students on the course, those that lived with their parents or those who did not have children. A second focus group session was conducted with two more women from the course in order to make it more representative. Interviewing two more women did make a difference. I was able to test some of the views that had already been raised and got to hear some different perspectives.

In line with the individual interviews the focus groups followed the same format. Sessions were conducted within a small meeting room within the college in order to avoid interruption and sessions were recorded. The decision to record the sessions was made as the groups were small and note taking was viewed as distracting and unable to capture all spoken data. These sessions appeared less formal and conversation flowed more easily probably because the women knew each other and felt comfortable in each other's presence. The overall recording quality of the focus group session was very good and there were very few instances where the women talked at the same time making deciphering of speech problematic. At the beginning of each session I reiterated the purpose of my research and obtained written consent from each of the women (see appendix 8).

4.12 Transcribing of individual interviews

The reading of methodological literature raised concerns for me regarding the length of time required to transcribe a recorded interview (Kavale and Brinkmann, 2009). Unable to touch type I turned to a trusted and proficient retired colleague who had ergonomic equipment to transcribe each recorded interview verbatim. It was still important to enter

into dialogue regarding ethical conduct in order to maintain professionalism and avoid future misunderstandings regarding the arrangement. A consent form and itemised bill was produced and records were kept regarding hourly rate and payment.

At the beginning of my study I paid for a number of interviews to be transcribed. In the future I would not be so quick to do this as my focus changed and I did not include this data within my analysis. This was frustrating because I felt I had wasted my colleague's time and my money. The value of transcribing my own interviews was realised when my colleague was unable to type up two sessions. Although this was a lengthy task at the end of it I had a clearer understanding of the stories the women were telling through the written words because I was able to appreciate where the emphasis and the emotion had been in the recording. Following this I went back and listened to the recordings of the interviews that had already been transcribed and re-read the transcripts. I learnt more about my own interviewing style (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009.). Repetition was highlighted and use of "so" at the beginning of every new question. From this awareness I was able to improve my interviewing technique.

Following interview transcriptions were made available for each participant to view. Interestingly only one student throughout the whole data collection period requested to view a copy of their transcribed interview and this was during my pilot study. This participant admitted that this was out of curiosity rather than checking the content was bona fide and later commented on how they had not realised how many times they stated "erm" within the interview. This may have been because the participants did not feel intimidated by the interview process yet it could also have been due to a lack of understanding of possible consequences. In the case of the latter this is when the ethical responsibility of the researcher is paramount. Throughout the process of conducting my study I made every effort to 'accurately represent the women's voices' (LePage-Lees,

1997, p.4.). I showed each of the four women the introduction I had produced from their individual interview transcripts (see section 2.6) and asked if their voices had been accurately represented. Although these women were not partners in my study and data collection was not intended to be a joint enterprise their feedback was important. I was reassured to some extent that they were happy with how I was representing them and I had done this accurately. The women however, did not like the use of verbatim, as Chloe stated it made her sound “*thick*”. I did say to the women that I would not necessarily change anything they suggested, the women were happy for this to happen. It was a bit disconcerting that the women never questioned what I did. This could have been because I was carrying out the research in a professional, sensitive manner or that the women trusted me, however, it could have also been an indication of the women’s limited experience of research (Braun and Clarke, 2013.). This reinforced the importance of research being carried out in an ethical manner in order to prevent participants from being exploited.

It was inevitable that the stories being told by the women were influenced by the interview situation and therefore were shown in context (Potter and Wetherell, 1994). This line of reasoning is consistent with the views of Kvale (1996). Ethnomethodology propounds that interviews are a specific example of a social interaction in which meaning is co-constructed, in the case of my research this meaning was constructed between myself as interviewer and each participant as interviewee.

4.13 Data analysis

Once transcribed, all dialogue was analysed and a more informed and focused examination was conducted. I referred to the fifteen point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) in order to address possible concerns regarding quality control. The thematic analysis process is used for ‘identifying, analysing

and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79.) and supports the 'constant comparative method or grounded theory' (Allen 2010, p.1607.) approach at the heart of my research. In response to Braun and Clarke (2006) my data was prepared before analysis. Each initial interview was transcribed verbatim and was checked against the original recording for 'accuracy' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 96.). Each transcript was then scrutinised line by line. Notes were made and codes applied ensuring that 'equal attention' was given to the process in order to capture themes, as they 'do not just emerge' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 96.). Any metaphors or unresolved issues were highlighted and a note to seek clarification during a second more focused interview was made. It was important that these issues were approached during subsequent interviews in order to avoid misinterpretation of data during analysis however it was also of value as it gave the women the opportunity to reflect and revisit a topic. I have produced an episodic set of interviews over four years. This has provided a different perspective to my research as it has enabling me to follow the women's progress and perspectives and see how their stories played out. Useful questions during this phase included, *why did you think that at that time?* and *how have your views changed?* Data was then analysed taking care to decipher and construe rather than purely paraphrase or describe. This provides a 'convincing and well organised' account providing enough time has been allowed to complete all phases adequately (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 96.). As with grounded theory the researcher is viewed as active within the research process (Braun and Clarke, 2006.).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) fifteen point checklist of criteria helped identify potential weakness within my research. In doing so I was able to address possible concerns regarding quality control. Using the checklist as a guide I realised that had made the mistake of using my key questions as themes and on another occasion that I had provided unconvincing analysis where there was a disparity between my data my theory and my analytic claims. Analysing data was a time consuming yet essential activity and was a

process that was developed and revisited throughout the research. Three important themes were identified during the literature review, these were:

1. *Future aspirations,*
2. *Fair access,*
3. *Support structures.*

The three themes relate to the implicit and explicit assumptions that underpin widening participation policy. I did not use the policy related themes to start the analysis process as I wanted to find out the themes that were important to the women. This provided the opportunity to compare and contrast themes and to explore the reasons for and implications of any similarities or differences.

I knew that applying codes would aid analysis but I was unsure of where to start or what codes to apply (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009.). I did not have preset codes as I did not want to have preconceived ideas nor have a narrow focus. I printed out the first transcript as it made it easier to look at. I began the coding process by looking at the transcript line by line. At the end of each line I manually wrote one word which was key to the conversation at that point. This system was applied until I reached the end of the first page of transcription. I wrote the key words on a separate piece of paper. This was confusing as it was just a list of words that did not make sense to me, I had expected an instant result and I felt deflated. The list of disjointed words felt impersonal and did not say or mean anything to me, those wonderful stories that the women had shared with me had been reduced to a list of what I thought were meaningless words. This went against the ethos of my research.

I had to make sense of the data that I had gathered in a way that made sense to me otherwise it was not going to happen. I took time out to think about data collection and to take it back to basics, I thought about what data collection meant to me, why I had chosen to collect the data the way I had and what that meant. This was valuable *time out* to reflect

and enabled me to ensure that I did not lose sight of what I was doing and why I was doing it. The focus of my research was the stories that the women told about their lives. I thought about how the women told their stories through using personal pronouns and that “i” would probably be used the most if the women were talking about themselves. I went back to the transcripts and the personal statements that each woman made, focusing on the sentence around the word I, for example “*I am not saying if, I am saying I am*” (AI1P9L36). Each statement was given a code so for example this statement relates to future aspiration and was marked with a green highlighter.

Code AI1P9L36 relates to a conversation with Annie. The letter A relates to the code given to the first student interviewed, I1 relates to interview 1, P9 relates to page 9 of the transcript and L36 refers to the line number where the quote taken from Annie begins. Following this system code FG1P3L2 relates to a quote taken from line 2 on page 3 from focus group 1 and code CE1L5 relates to a quote taken from line 5 of email 1 from Chloe. The decision to include codes including line numbers was to provide easy access to the original data source. The decision was made to include the line number of the start of the quote to keep the reference code short and as clear as possible. Counting down each line to find the start of the quote was a laborious task and with hindsight producing a transcript with a number at the end of each line would have speeded up the process. This was rectified for subsequent transcripts (see appendix 19).

The system devised for coding made sense to me. I explained the coding system to a colleague as a way to test whether it was easily interpreted by others. The system did make sense and my colleague was able to apply it to the sample data provided. This coding system was then applied to each transcript. Not transcribing the interviews myself due to time constraints and lack of ability put me at a disadvantage when it came to being familiar

with the data. Being responsible for the coding enabled that issue to be rectified. I was also able to use the skills developed to resolve any future problems that I encountered.

Statements with the same focus from all of the women were grouped together on one sheet. Once data had been catalogued it was checked against the original transcript in order to validate authenticity and to amend any errors. Each group of statements was observed and presented as a broad theme. An example of this was *future aspiration*. The themes supported those identified with policy assumptions. This could suggest that the affects of widening participation policy had filtered through practice to the women or it could suggest that these themes were ones that I was most receptive to.

I recognise the dilemma of how to ‘maintain my class identity’ and that of the women I interviewed (Plummer, 2000: xii.). The decision to use personal pronouns *I*, *my* and *me* throughout my thesis was a conscious one and one that was important to adopt in order to legitimatise the working class voice and place it at the heart of this thesis.

The women’s stories were presented in their own words through direct quotes, when I read their transcripts I could hear their voices. It was important to use the ‘language of our class background’ (Plummer, 2000, p. 91.). In response to some of the women saying that they sounded “*thick*” I omitted “*erms*” and broad accent such as “*gunna*” and “*bin*” instead of “*going to*” and “*been*” as it was important that the women were not perceived in this way by anyone reading my thesis.

When two or more participant quotes illustrated the same point I included the most ‘extensive, illuminating, and well-formulated statement’ (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 280.). This was to ensure that data analysis was concise and clearly structured. This proved to be a challenge. Although I wanted to include everything that the women said as it was so

interesting I needed to remember that I was carrying out research not writing a set of biographies. I believe there is another outlet for this as other students may benefit from hearing another student's story.

During analysis the selection of data was unavoidable. In this way the voices of the women were channelled through me. In basing my judgement on what the women chose to share with me and the way that they said it this was open to 'varying interpretation' (Ribbens and Edwards, 1997, p. 99.). In this way potential ethical issues needed to be taken into consideration.

4.14 Ethical considerations

I considered ethical issues carefully throughout the whole research process in order to provide integrity and maintain standards (Alderson, 2005). I referred to a range of sources to inform my understanding including the documents *Code of Practice and Ethics Principles* (The Open University, 2015) and the *BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA, 2011). Qualitative research poses increased 'ethical dilemmas' (Clifford, 1997, p. 94.) due to the nature of the researcher/participant relationship; however no line of research involving people can be regarded as 'exempt from such concerns' (SRA, 2003, p. 7.). I referred to the *ethical issues at seven research stages* model (see appendix 21) to inform my thinking of the ethical and moral issues relating to 'interviewing for research purposes' in order to produce an ethical protocol for my study (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.61.).

The underlying purpose of my research was to develop my understanding of the women who study on the foundation degree with the intention to inform future recruitment and on course support on the foundation degree within the college. This relates to Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) first stage of thematizing, where the purpose of interviewing within a

study is to go beyond the 'scientific value of the knowledge sought' to improve the situation investigated (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 63.). Stage two relates to the design of the interview process. This involves consideration of issues relating to confidentiality, the possible ramifications of the study and informed consent. Like Millar (1998, p. 65.) I experienced 'feelings of professional frustration' when one of the women was unable to continue their involvement in the study. Donna left the foundation degree as a result of her experiences of studying on the course 'the very thing' that my research was about (Millar, 1998, p. 65.). Following this I did contact Donna by telephone but she was now in full-time employment and unwilling to be interviewed. Permission was given however for me to include the content of the telephone conversation within my study yet as I typed this up in my notes later that day I questioned whether this form of data gathering was 'legitimate' (Millar, 1998, p. 65.). On reflection I decided to include this information because it contributed to my understanding of the women's experiences, it was gathered in an ethical and professional manner and supported the classic grounded theory ideal of all participant related information being viewed as potential data as highlighted earlier. Unlike Millar (1998) I did not get the opportunity to carry out a final interview with my participant. This was regrettable however it emphasises the unpredictable yet interesting nature of qualitative research.

Conflict also arose between my role as researcher and that of programme leader for the foundation degree. As programme leader the women would come to me to air a particular problem yet during interview they tended to either skirt around the topic or play down the issue. Although frustrating as a researcher I had to respect the needs of the women and to understand why they may have chosen to do this. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) refer to the possible impact of research on the participants yet it is also important to consider possible future impact on the organisation and the researcher. The pilot study identified difficulties and dilemmas inherited as a result of conducting my research in a particular context.

Positioned as 'insider researcher', conflict also arose between my role as researcher and that of Ramsbridge College employee (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 332.). Approaching members of staff within the college to ask if I could speak with their students was, on some occasions met with suspicion. In trying to defer or by not returning my email some lecturers could be perceived as protective of who they allowed to access their students. Colleagues can fear repercussions and believe that their own practice may be under scrutiny, that there is somehow a hidden agenda to my research and that maybe I am using the guise of conducting research in order to poach students from other curriculum areas. I appreciate that staff are busy and may be more inclined to help me with my research if there was a clearer and more immediate benefit for them. I addressed this dilemma by asking permission from the curriculum programme leader and making my intentions clear. I also invited class lecturers to remain present throughout the information giving and participant recruiting session and ensured that I did not ask questions which could be perceived as swaying students' preference to a particular course or put words into the students' mouths.

The possible impact of the interview situation such as stress and changes in the participant's self understanding is considered within Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) stage three of ethical issues at seven research stages. These factors were evident during my study. The first example was when interviewing Donna prompted her to think about her frustrating home situation. The second example was the dilemma of interviewing Beth. Although this would have provided rich data, I knew her marriage had broken down, that she had a lot of outstanding work and was depressed. I did not want to put her under further pressure which might have led to her leaving the course or making a complaint about my conduct.

Before I began my research initial permission was sought from the principal of Ramsbridge College. She was updated on a regular basis throughout the process (see appendix 7). Prior to commencement all parties, including my line manager and the participants, were made aware of the intentions of the study including purpose of investigation and audience of final report. Debriefing was carried out as clearly as possible in order to avoid the women being misled or deceived; and all those involved were given deadlines to decline involvement with the research at any point if they chose to do so (Oliver, 2009). The study was carried out in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) therefore all information received was treated as confidential (OPSI 1992). Each of the women was referred to by a pseudonym and any identifying details such as names of family or place of work or home address were masked. A pen drive was allocated to store interview files on. This and the digital voice recorder being used to record dialogue during interviews had no other use outside the research project and was stored in a locked filing cabinet. This ensured that data was not being accessed by outside sources thus maintaining confidentiality.

Consent was sought at each stage of data collection to provide transparency and prevent possible misunderstanding. Consent forms were produced and were signed by the women and myself at each stage of data collection. One copy was given to the participant and one was retained for my records. Data was collected on college premises. Interview sessions were arranged to coincide when the women were in college for classes to make it more convenient and to increase the likelihood of sessions taking place. Although it would have made negotiating sessions easier and possibly made the participants feel more comfortable in their choice of familiar surrounding I decided not to conduct interviews off college premises. On consideration this situation would have created issues for example, participants arranging cover whilst on work premises or those relating to myself operating as a lone worker (HSE, 2011).

The dilemma of providing participant anonymity is addressed within Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) fourth stage of ethical issues. I considered referring to the participants by code for example, participant 1 and so on but this was in conflict with the ethos of my research. I did consider referring to the participants by name. Although this would have enabled my research to have a more personal feel and echo the research approach of grounded theory I considered possible future repercussions of naming participants who were 'members of a relatively small community' such as family or friends being embarrassed or upset by what information had been shared (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 64). This evaluation led to the decision to change the names. This contributed to the person centred tone that I wanted my research to have whilst providing anonymity and respecting confidentiality. It was important to devise a logical system for coding pseudonyms in order to avoid confusion. This was done by creating names starting at the beginning of the alphabet so for example, participant 1's alias begins with A, participant 2 with B and so on. The dilemma of providing institutional anonymity was also considered carefully. For the purpose of this thesis the town and college has been referred to as Ramsbridge and Ramsbridge College respectively in order to provide some anonymity.

4.15 Ontological and epistemological considerations

This thesis explores the educational experiences and aspirations of a particular group of women studying on a particular foundation degree within Ramsbridge College. In order to carry out this research it is inevitable that my epistemological and ontological position will be shaped by the context. My perception in relation to ontology is that this research is an opportunity to critique the way that successive governments, or to put it another way, those 'in power' make assumptions about working class students, especially about how such students engage with higher education. My position in relation to epistemology is that the research aims to provide a counter-balance to what counts as knowledge about working class students in the policy and practice of widening participation. These explicit

statements about my ontology and epistemological position make it clear how I perceive the interaction between ontology and epistemology. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the focus on four working class women, this thesis adopts a broadly feminist view which sees ontological and epistemological research as closely inter-related (Morley and Walsh 1995). This is evident in the way that I am positioned, as a woman of working class origins within the research. In this sense both my ontological and epistemological positions derive from my being 'close' to the research. I argue that this closeness puts me in a privileged position which can be summarised as being 'of' the working class but no longer 'in' that class, I also argue that such positioning empowers me academically and enables me to bring a 'different perspective' to the study (Morley and Walsh 1995, p. 185.). The interactions of ontology and epistemology are also evident in the implications for both the women in the study and for myself of showing how role, gender and class all intersect and are shaped into a particular social construct in the place that is the focus of the study. It is also important to be alert to the possible limitations on what counts as knowledge that arise as a result of me being perceived as a working class researcher writing about the lives of working class women. This raises potential issues at different levels, not least of which is how I can make claims that will be accepted as being truth claims about my understanding, what the women in the study say and what I argue is evidence in aspects of policy. To counter such possibilities I draw on empirical evidence as the basis of the arguments that are sustained in the thesis.

This empirical approach is based on my own experience as programme leader for the foundation degree. I have a professional interest in the study but also a personal interest as I share some similarities with the women studying on the foundation degree. These connections are important in helping me make sense of both the women's stories and of my own but goes beyond this level of meaning to argue that it establishes a wider validity which is sufficient to challenge more established epistemologies and ontologies around

working class women in higher education. I will therefore be adopting an interpretive approach that will seek to uncover the social reality of the students (Gray, 2004).

My research has required an on-going consideration of both ontology and epistemology which has highlighted the value of the concept of constructed multiple realities (Gray 2004). This concurs with what emerges from the research in terms of the way in which the individual perspectives which are a key part of the thesis are rooted in personal experience, beliefs and values which can be influenced and reinforced by culture and the assumptions held about others. This has the further implication that my epistemological and ontological position is shaped by a phenomenological perspective which highlights how 'reality' is a social construct and which considers how individuals found in this research represent their own lives and what shapes their lives. To an extent this is shaped by the location of Ramsbridge College in a working class town with numerous indicators of multiple deprivation. The effect of place is apparent in the narratives that this research has enabled students to share.

4.16 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has clarified the focus and approach of my research and justified the use of the participant group chosen. This chapter has also provided a rationale for the data collection methods selected and set out the strategies determined for data analysis. This chapter has been provided in order to show how my research is being conducted with rigour and in a transparent and ethical manner. My research may indicate how the support available to higher education students within the college can be improved, reinforcing the view that in 'case study research *contexts matter*' (Burgess et al 2006, p. 59.). Although the conclusions drawn from my study are institution specific the new knowledge I have created as a result of my research will be of value to those practitioners within comparable circumstances and inform both my own and others future research (Burgess et al, 2006).

Chapters 1 to 4 have set out my frame of reference by providing a structure of terms and values within a particular described context. The following chapter will present an analysis and interpretation of the data gathered during my research.

Chapter 5: Data analysis and interpretation

5.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter presents an analysis and interpretation of the data gathered during my research. I begin by identifying themes within the data and justifying their inclusion within the chapter. Patterns within the themes are then highlighted and ‘consistencies and inconsistencies’ explored (Burgess et al, 2006, p. 87.). The data is used to support the suggestion that there are assumptions within government that are consistent despite shifts in language and that these assumptions have continued to shape policy over a fifty year period.

The women within my study cannot possibly represent all other women. What the data from my study does succeed in doing is to highlight some of the issues some mature working class women face when deciding to study for a foundation degree in Ramsbridge College. This chapter considers how my findings relate to and begin to answer each of the three research questions. Possible shortcomings, limitations and issues raised by the data, analysis and interpretation will also be critiqued in order to offer recommendation for future practice within Ramsbridge College.

5.2 Rationale for the choice in themes

A number of assumptions locate people in relation to higher education in particular ways. A recurring theme within widening participation policy is that working class students have low aspirations (Dearing 1997, DfEE 1998, DfES 2003, DfES 2004, Francis 2006, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011a). An assumption of low aspiration can be seen to derive from viewing working class students as a homogenous group (Dearing, 1997, DfES 2003, HEFCE, 2007). Some commentators suggest that they are less likely to study to ‘increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake’ (Dearing, 1997, p. 72.) and more likely

to lack academic skills (European Commission, 1993, DfES 2003) and support structures (DfES, 2006b, Milburn 2010, SMCPC, 2013) which enable them to study. This thesis argues that these assumptions continue to influence policy because they are left unchallenged. The attitudes towards education and the people accessing it, underpin the assumptions that shape policy. Widening participation policy is made by people that tend not to have insider knowledge. These assumptions are reflected in educational practice. In particular my findings show how these assumptions work out in relation to working class women studying higher education in a further education college.

My research identifies three important themes:

1. *Future aspirations,*
2. *Fair access,*
3. *Support structures.*

These themes relate to the topics that the women viewed as important and to the assumptions that underpin widening participation policy. Exploring assumptions and some academic literature informed my understanding of the aspiration levels working class women can have and the implications of higher education provision within further education institutions with a particular focus on foundation degrees.

5.3 Research question 1 – How do the women’s experiences of education reflect and challenge the assumptions underpinning widening participation policy?

Low aspiration as an explanation for low participation rates in higher education is a recurring theme in policy documents and in discussions of these documents (Dearing, 1997, DfEE 1998, DfES 2003, Francis 2006, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011.). The concept of *cycle of deprivation* is offered as an explanation as to why such students have low aspiration. Issues such as high unemployment, low income and poor housing, health and

academic skills are linked and are viewed as ‘mutually reinforcing’ (Welshman, 2002, p. 199.). The argument is that this combination produces a vicious cycle that individuals, families and communities find difficult to move out of. The *cycle of deprivation* is viewed by some as a ‘rational response to the restricted opportunities available’ for many of those from working class backgrounds (Greenbank 2009, p. 34.).

As the women in my study live in a deprived town, in an isolated area of the northwest of England it might be expected that they would typify low aspirations of the sort that underpins both the thinking in widening participation policy (Dearing, 1997, DfEE 1998, DfES 2003, Francis 2006, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011) and in concepts such as the *cycle of deprivation*. Expectations of low aspiration might also derive from the fact that these women tended to have mothers who conformed to characteristics associated with working class women as wife and mother (Purvis, 1995.). The women’s mothers had caring and domestic roles within the home, took on part-time, low paid work to supplement the family income in times of need, had low level or no qualifications and did not continue in study following post-compulsory education. The lives of the women’s mothers revolved around the needs of the family with little time for themselves:

“She worked until my younger brother was seven, once he’d gone to junior school she then went out to work again...at the Co-op furniture store in Ramsbridge and I just think back now to what she did; she worked very long days and looked after a family at the same time, and I just think...it was so incredibly hard...for her”
(BI3P3L39).

Working class women tend to enter into the traditional role of wife and mother aware of the inequalities within gendered roles. The ‘stoic resignation to fate’ associated with the role of women in society remains for many working class women along with the implicit and often explicit assumption of the role of women to *serve* (Purvis, 1995, p. 52.). Beth’s

mother worked part time and never learnt to drive. She was dependant on Beth's father *"because that was the life...Dad needed her to have"* after his death *"suddenly she was on her own and she just eventually brushed herself off and has led an amazing life"* (BI3P3L17). I argue that the situation for many working class women is less about acceptance and more about coping with the daily barriers that prevent them from taking advantage of the constrained choices available to them. The women in my study viewed their mother's demanding role within the family as unfair. Donna was frustrated that her mother had not pursued her dream to become a dietician and saw that she and her family had been 'detriments' to her mother's career (Davies et al 1994, p. 29.). For some working class women the memories they have of their mothers are stories of educational disadvantage, escape and of wanting to leave the past behind. Such stories motivate these women into attempting to change their current situation (Quinn, 2004a) yet although frustrated the women were also aware that the same scenario of their lives revolving around the needs of the family with little time for themselves was being reproduced for them:

"I get really angry sometimes and think oh if it wasn't for my genes...because I'm the same, I do it, my mum was always there for us, and then so I try and do that now as well. She made a lot...of sacrifices. It makes me feel a bit sad for her sometimes because she still isn't happy in the type of work that she does. She's had loads of different jobs... Even now if she is applying for a new job she'll hide it from my dad in case he's got something to say about it" (DI2P2L36).

In contrast with educational research (Crozier and Reay 2011) widening participation policy tends to group those from working class backgrounds as homogeneous (Dearing 1997, DfES 2003, HEFCE 2007). The language used to make generalisations such as 'the potential benefits of participation [in higher education] are not self evident to people living in communities where no one has previously entered' (Dearing, 1997, p. 108.), are blunt

and impersonal. Even with the relatively small sample in this study both similarities and differences are apparent between the women and their families. The government cannot get away with such simplistic assumptions as they ignore reality. Not all women conform to the working class ideal of wife and mother. Chloe's mother returned to study when she and her sister were in primary school. Seeing her mother "*with her head stuck in a book doing some sort of Open University course*" (CI2P4L17), getting a full time job and the impact that had on the family made a lasting impression:

"I just think well if she can do it I can do it. There's no reason why I can't get degrees and things and get myself a nice job" (CI2P4L17).

Having a significant role model is viewed as a key factor in encouraging those from non-traditional groups into higher education (Mirza, 1993). The influence of the family, especially the mother, is prominent in educational research literature (Quinn, 2004a). The women in my study also tended to identify their mothers as the significant role model in their lives. I am not suggesting that this is a working class characteristic rather that the women in my study drew on their mothers' strength and resilience. The fact that the women entered higher education despite the fact that most of their mothers had few or no qualifications and had not studied at a higher level calls into question key assumptions of the cycle of deprivation. This could be explained in part by the view that young people from working class backgrounds are 'less likely to aspire to follow in family member's footsteps' (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014, p. 77.) into skilled manual and unskilled manual work possibly as a result of seeing the struggle their families have endured but also by the fact that the women's mothers had had aspirations beyond that of wife and mother (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014, Kintrea, St Claire and Houston, 2015). Donna's mother "*always used to order books on the...human body and things like that... she...always said she would have loved to have been a dietician*" (DI1P18L10). Some, like Donna's mother

enquired about college courses only to realise that the barriers they faced prevented them from pursuing education any further:

“They [tutor] said she would get money for it but then she never, so she had to give up...dad needed to work and she...still had to go out to work”(DI2P6L5).

The women’s mothers did have aspirations but most of them could not do anything to achieve them. This was sensed by their children who found openings that might help achieve some aspirations. This situation is in conflict with the concepts of habitus and cycle of deprivation which suggest a subconscious norm and a rational response to restricted opportunities and expectations relating to class and gender. Like their mothers, the women in my study often had high future aspirations when growing up. For Annie this was to be a nurse, Beth and Chloe to become teachers and Donna to become a lawyer. These are all roles that require a higher education qualification. Through the roles they aspired to, the women in my study expected to study at a higher level. Some commentators suggest that some working class people have high aspirations but they turn out to be unrealistic due to a lack of insider knowledge which would enable them to be realised (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014). Other accounts tend to focus on insider knowledge whereas my emphasis lies with the barriers relating to class and gender that the women face.

The complexities of working class aspirations are revealed in my study. These complexities highlight the assumption underpinning widening participation policy (Dearing 1997, DfEE 1998, DfES 2003, DfES 2004, Francis 2006, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011) that all working class women can be perceived as a homogeneous group possessing low aspiration. I refer to this phenomenon as the *aspiration fallacy*.

I accept that working class women in my study may not represent the majority but nevertheless the fact that they do not have values assumed of their class is perhaps unsurprising, as unlike the majority of those from working class backgrounds, the women in my study have been 'future orientated' and 'aspirational' enough to go to study at a higher level (Greenbank, 2009, p. 39.). My perspective made these fault lines apparent to me. I cannot claim high aspirations for most working class women based on such a small study but what I can do is use my data to explore contradictions and inconsistencies. I will argue that some working class women did have aspirations yet those aspirations are often not fulfilled due to the barriers they face.

Most women who study on the foundation degree at Ramsbridge College are aged over twenty one years old. This was reflected in the 2011/2012 cohort where fourteen women of the eighteen were aged between twenty two and forty four. Analysing the data from my research helped me to understand why the women had clear aspirations yet entered higher education as mature students rather than at the age of eighteen. This in turn helped me to understand that the reason why most working class women do not go on to participate within higher education due to a range of interacting factors.

Some commentators suggest that academic failure can lead to a *fixed mindset* (Dweck, 2012). In this situation individuals give up trying in similar situations for fear of future failings. This results in a *self fulfilling prophecy* where the outcome of a situation is matched by the prediction as a result of an action (Merton, 1968). The women in my study experienced repeated academic failure. Bullied at school, Donna did not achieve her predicted high GCSE grades. The fear of being bullied again prevented Donna from going on to college. Donna went on to work in various high street shops until her first child was born. Once her children were at school Donna made a conscious decision to get out of the house and mix with people as she had been at "*home for such a long time with the kids*"

that she was “*never going to find work*” (DI3P8L9). Donna worked as a volunteer at the Citizen’s Advice Centre in Ramsbridge. Sparked by her interest in law she went on to begin a course through them. There was a lot of drop out on the course and soon Donna was the only student remaining. When the trainer left due to ill health Donna was “*left in limbo*” (DI3P8L35) and she soon left herself. Donna then sought out careers advice only to be told that law was “*quite competitive*” and “*really hard to get into*” (DI2P3L32). Donna abandoned her thoughts of pursuing such a career and began a local Access to Higher Education course. This led on to a university place to study radiography; from which she later withdrew. Drop out amongst working class students has ‘very little to do with academic ability’ (Quinn, 2004b, p. 67.). It is important to understand drop out as a ‘cultural narrative that has an element of self-fulfilling prophecy’ as it suggests that there are wider factors than just aspiration that impact on higher education participation (Quinn, 2004b, p. 63.). Donna’s experience shows that some working class women do develop high aspirations supporting the view within education research literature (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014) that those from with working class backgrounds do not need to ‘aim higher’ as suggested in policy (DfES, 200a). This example shows that in order to understand how such aspirations are shaped it is necessary to go beyond the untested assumption I have identified within policy. My data shows that although the aspirations the women had growing up tended to be renegotiated as a result of class and gender pressures the women were resilient in their commitment to pursue education. This concept is central to my thesis. The notion that the women want to study is powerful and complex. This is important and has to be considered in order to acquire a richer picture of how some working class women view higher education.

My research calls into question any suggestion that working class women tend to choose only careers and subjects that reflect their existing position within society (Lynch, 1999) and argues that those from working class backgrounds do have aspirations but that these

are shaped in various ways which then impact on participation within higher education (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014). My data suggests that employment and study for many working class women is less about choice in a 'free and meaningful sense' (Lynch, 1999, p.89.) and more about how what is available fits in with the expectations of class and gender. This is supported by a structuralist view which claims individuals are pushed into particular positions whether they know they are being pushed and whether they know by what forces or not (Gambetta 1987). Working class women are more likely to be employed within caring and leisure occupations (ONS, 2013b). In this way working class women can be viewed as being in a position of deficit. It is perhaps more precise to suggest that a constrained choice of courses is available to the women as a result of location and a tendency to pursue jobs and study which are more likely to fit around family commitments is often more likely.

Rather than having a 'fatalistic or pessimistic' view of the future working class women tended instead to have 'realistic rather than low aspirations' as time went on (Greenbank, 2009, p. 39.). Before beginning the foundation degree the women conformed to the characteristics of running the home, caring for family and part-time work, often associated with working class (Purvis, 1995). Donna was a full time mum; Annie was also a full time mum and a carer for her daughter and husband; Beth was a part time higher level teaching assistant in a primary school supporting her children and ill husband and Chloe worked a shift in the local Co-op each weekend. The women considered working with children and going on to study the foundation degree following a period of reflection when they were experiencing conflict and thoughts of the future (Mezirow, 1978, Hartsock 1987). The women could pinpoint a particular time and place for this reflection and could remember details clearly. During this 'decisive moment' a 'click seems to occur' (Branden, 1994, p.105.). I need to be cautious about implying that women only study for a foundation degree at Ramsbridge College because they have been at a turning point. I suggest instead

that a particular situation presents its own issues and barriers yet can also create an opportunity for new experiences in the future. Both Annie and Beth were given an ultimatum by their employer. Annie's came nine months after the birth of her first child and on finding she was pregnant for the second time. Following repeated absence due to reoccurring periods of depression Beth's employer in the civil service gave her an ultimatum of "*come back in three weeks or you're finished*" (BI1P5L15). The decision to leave work was taken for Annie and Beth by their employer. Both women felt that the options made available had not given a true choice. For them, an 'at least as good as' choice would have been more fair and less upsetting (Allingham, 2002, p. 26.). At this time Beth did not have children and her health was her priority, for the other three women family life featured strongly in their present and future. When Chloe reflected on her situation as a single parent living in a rented terraced house and working part-time in the Co-op she did not want it to be her future. She knew that change was her responsibility:

"I just thought well nobody's going to do it for me, nobody's going to say hello have this wonderful job, you don't have to make pies in the Co-op anymore, there you go, go and do that for lots of money, so I thought, right, I'd best do it then" (CI1P6L42).

Following the realisation that something had to change the women initially felt relief, yet this was quickly replaced by a range of emotions. Worrying about the practicalities of studying such as paying the bills left Beth "*absolutely terrified*" and lack of confidence led many of the women to question "*what if I actually find out that I'm not very good at it?*" (BI3P1L32). Feelings of guilt are often associated with mature women students (Edwards, 1993). This was reflected in my study. Those women with children viewed the 'happiness and contentment' of their family as their priority and responsibility (Edwards, 1993, p. 52.). When Donna travelled to the university to study radiography her children attended morning nursery and after-school club and were often dropped off and picked up by her

husband. The new routine added to the existing tension and family life descended into “chaos” (DI1P1L23). These events made Donna ill. Holding herself responsible for the unhappiness of her family Donna made the decision to withdraw from the radiography course; she did not go back to being a full time wife and mother or give up on the idea of studying:

“I knew I would have hated it. I used to call it brain rot, just being at home every day. I need something to do, something for myself, I need something to strive for” (DI2P5L28).

Donna decided to find a local course that “*would fit around the kids more*” (DI1P1L26) and give her husband the time he needed to set up his own business. In some respects Donna adopted the role of *martyr mum* and conformed to the expectations of a patriarchal society where mothers are ‘totally giving and available, downplaying their own needs, ambitions and desires’ (Baumgardner and Richards, 2011, p. 211.). Additionally, feminist authors including Barrett and McIntosh (1982) view guilt as a signifier of women’s oppression. While accepting the force of such arguments my data suggests that what can be described as guilt can provide a starting point for some women. The role of mother was a significant part of the women’s lives and each of the women identified themselves foremost as “*a mum*” (AI1P9L1). The women were committed to their family, studying on the foundation degree in part for the benefit of others. This was less about guilt and more about providing positive role models that the women hoped would help their children have better lives in the future (Bowl 2003, Quinn 2004a). These concerns can provide mature women with ‘instrumental motivation’ (Davies et al, 1994, p. 167.) and an ‘impetus to study’ (Edwards 1993, p. 56.). Having sole responsibility for her care, Chloe felt she had to “*do it for her [daughter]*” (CI1P9L1) as it was her responsibility to gain the qualifications required to apply for better paid jobs and ultimately improve the standard of living in ‘material terms’ for her family (Edwards, 1993, p. 56.). I argue that the lives of some

working class women are more complex than the literature would suggest where fluctuating levels of self-esteem and issues of engrained gender roles and conflict impact on the women's attempt to combine family life and study. My data illuminated other stories that are neglected and obscured by policy documents which often operate at a grander scale (Dearing 1997, DfEE 1998, DfES 2000a, DfES 2003c).

Beth's motivation to study also drew on a desire to benefit her children in part but this motivation was shaped by very different personal circumstances. As children, Beth and her siblings were affected by their father's mental ill health which controlled the household to the extent that they did not go on school trips or feel able to leave home to study. As a mother, Beth was trying to learn from her childhood experiences and provide her children the opportunities she did not have:

"hopefully, I will have a photograph of myself with cap and gown as inspiration for my children to do it" (BI2P5L29).

The suggestion that it is the 'doing of the degree' in the sense of proving academic ability, that is important rather than the 'instrumental goal orientation' (Reay, 2003, p. 304.), in the sense of the means to gain employment, is in conflict with the explicit assumption underpinning widening participation policy that working class students are less likely to study to 'increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake' (Dearing, 1997, p.72.). The perspective gained from the women in my study both extends and refines these viewpoints. The data from my research suggests that the women were less likely to study *solely* 'to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake' (Dearing, 1997, p. 72.). Education not related to employment was viewed by the women as a luxury and was seen by them as being even more acceptable if it could be construed as having potential benefits for others, particularly children. This corresponds with the notion on selfless working class wife and mother (Purvis, 1995). Both Annie and Beth had a husband/partner who was

unable to work due to ill health. Studying on the foundation degree and the potential opportunities it may provide in the future were viewed as of benefit to them. The anticipated future employment as a teacher could be justified if it enabled Annie to support her family financially so they could no longer be dependent on benefits. In order to justify the sacrifices associated with studying, education needed to be seen as having a clear purpose. For Annie education was viewed as having a vocational purpose:

"I don't want to have to think education will go on and on and on forever, I need to do the education, get what I'm going to get and get into the job world"

(AI2P4L33).

Although Beth had wanted to become a teacher when she was at school, she made it clear when first interviewed that she did not intend to leave her job as a Teaching Assistant or progress onto the BA (Hons) Education and Professional Studies 'top up' course after completion of the foundation degree. Beth admitted that *"at the moment...I just love the fact that I'm learning"* (BI1P9L25). The fact that Beth chose not to share any thoughts she may have had on future aspirations by suggesting *"let's just see where we end up"* (BI1P9L47) could have suggested unclear future aspirations (Greenwood, 2009). A sense of failure is engrained in many working class students once they enter higher education (Quinn, 2004b) some less confident women protected themselves by not committing themselves to longer term goals. Studying on the foundation degree was *"also so much about...proving to myself that I can do it"* (BI1P9L22) for Beth. The faith that some family and friends had in the women's ability and their expectations that they could successfully study at university level put further pressure on what were often low levels of self-esteem:

"people say, you'll find it a breeze and actually now I've started I think well actually I don't know whether I will because I don't know whether I can write in the right way. I don't know whether I can read the right stuff and understand"

it...because of low self-esteem...I've never pushed myself, I think I've always backed off perhaps before I've got to the point of being judged" (BI1P10L29).

When interviewed for the second time in February 2012 Beth now spoke about longer term future goals and the possible direction she wanted the foundation degree to take her. My initial anxieties about her withdrawing from the course however, were quickly dismissed. For Beth, going into mainstream teaching now would almost be the easy option to take. As her self-esteem began to develop during the first semester Beth was more confident about her capabilities and in sharing them:

"I'm not sure if it's enough anymore...I am fascinated by the psychology and the sociology elements of it...My ideal role would be as a specialist teacher"
(BI2P2L39).

The women in my study developed their career focus through their experiences of being with their own children or other family members. Annie acquired an interest in child development following the support she and her daughter received from a home-visiting educational service, the Portage scheme (NPA, 2014). Donna had a similar experience when her son received support through a play therapy programme and she went on to *"read up on...special needs"* (DI1P15L42). Some commentators suggest that these 'areas of study are more conducive to mature women students' (Edwards, 1993, p. 155) 'connecting their own experience to their academic lives' (Bowl, 2003, p. 65.). The women pursued a childcare qualification for a number of reasons. Firstly it was a topic that was familiar to the women and so they felt some confidence. Both Annie and Donna saw childcare as an easier option that would fit around family life, yet neither of them saw it as an easy option academically. On leaving school Chloe embarked upon a childcare course. At the time she viewed this as *"just something to do"* (CI3P1L9) with her friends. Although she still aspired to become a teacher, negative experiences at school had reduced

her confidence in her own ability to fulfil that goal. Chloe opted for a course that would still enable her to work with children yet she chose an option that was more easily achieved and which fitted in with the expectations of her peers. Chloe returned to childcare as a mature student. She rejected the suggestion that childcare was an easier option, seeing it more in terms of a lack of confidence and maturity:

“I was off placement quite a lot...down to confidence issues and just not being able to get up in the morning and go there because when I got there I didn’t know what I was doing” (CI1P8L13).

Some commentators suggest that in order for an individual to be in a position of ‘transcendence’ (see appendix 18) where they can support others in fulfilling their own potential, they must first reach the growth mindset stage of ‘self-actualisation’ in realising their own potential (Maslow, 1943, p. 371.). The women in my study began to develop levels of self-esteem through taking a keen interest in their child’s schooling and development and through others in the form of nurturing and caring of children and family members. The women viewed themselves as good mothers as they put the needs of their children first. Annie referred to herself as a *“pushy mother”* (AI1P1L36) in that she had actively sought out training to develop her knowledge and understanding of her daughter’s problems so she could support her. Annie’s personal sense of achievement came from seeing the progress her daughter was making and knowing that the support she had provided was making a difference. Annie’s confidence grew as a result:

“I have found that I can teach...they [the tutors] have made me see that I can do this” (AI1P1L15).

Individuals are prevented from reaching a state of self-actualisation if social needs such as belonging and self-esteem are not adequately or consistently met (Maslow, 1943). Policy suggests that working class students are more likely to lack support structures (Robbins

1963, Kennedy 1997, Dearing 1997, DfES 2003, DfES 2006b, Milburn 2010, SMCPC 2013). This is in part reflected in my research. My data suggests instead that some women lacked *consistent* or *adequate* support structures. Most of the women were the first in their family to study at a higher level. The women had support from their mothers when deciding whether to accept a place on the foundation degree place. The women's mothers often took on the role of "*devil's advocate*" (BI1P8L30). The women felt this was because the mothers always felt like they had been '*held back a bit*' (DI2P6L46). Despite being proud of their achievements, the women felt that family members and friends tended not to "*really understand*" (DI3P5L9) what studying at a higher level was about. It could have been that the women's parents did not have the language to express what they were feeling but also, as education research literature suggests, that the lack of such parentally trodden paths makes it harder for those from working class backgrounds to realise their aspirations (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014). The women did not enter education lightly but instead waited until they were sure they were making the right decision. They knew that they would find the workload and commitment to the course a struggle:

Every time I look at something and I think oh that looks good it never fits in and I just know everybody'll be oh yeah go on and [husband]'ll say oh yeah you go for it but then I know a month or so down the line it'll be me that's struggling because he won't fit in...I come up against that all the time" (DI3P6L25).

The women often found the emotional demands of family life difficult. This further suggests a lack of an adequate support structure for some.

"my husband is, in his way...looking after the children but the guilt that I get from him about not spending time with [them]...sort of almost negates that" (BI2P7L3).

Another example relating to the emotional demands of family life came from one of the women who participated in focus group 1. She sent me an email to say that she would not

be progressing on to the BA 'top up' course following completion of the foundation degree after being persuaded by her husband that it was "*mummy and wifey time now*" (E2L2).

This decision was viewed by the student as the right one to make for the family at the time.

The women often made decisions for the benefit of the family rather than for themselves:

"it's catch twenty-two because I'm not happy if I'm not here for them but then...I wouldn't go as [far] as to say it's resentment, but...I do sit and think, I wish it could be more about me sometimes" (DI2P3L10).

Analysing the stories the women told about growing up offered some explanation as to the origins of their low self-esteem. There appeared to be a combination of factors. I need to be careful as it is not my intention to blame the actions of the women's parents as individuals as it is the experiences of adult life and how they are dealt with that maintain 'self-esteem levels' (James and Nightingale, 2004, p. 17.). These stories highlight that the women reflected on how they were brought up and their mother's lives within a working class household. The women had positive role models in their lives. Although the women had mothers who wanted them to be happy throughout the time they were growing up the mothers tended to conform to the working class notion of male dominance and dependence. Most women did not have that specific, positive, proactive parenting where 'formal learning and caring are synonymous' that is attributed to more middle-class values (Evans, 2006, p. 9.). Annie, Beth and Donna had fathers who in their different ways controlled the family. When Annie was a teenager her father worked offshore on the oil rigs, this meant that he was often "*bringing home more money than other working class*" (AI1P7L33) men in the street. Without consulting the family he decided that the extra money coming into the household would be used to enable Annie to continue in education. This was not a positive experience for Annie and "*studying A-levels wasn't a conscious decision*" (AI1P7L23). Lack of discussion or choice in going to sixth form college meant that Annie rebelled and she failed to complete her A-levels.

I interviewed the women for the third time in April/May 2012 at the end of year one of the foundation degree. Although she had experienced conflict throughout the year Donna's self-esteem was developing and she wanted more independence. There was also the need to subsidise family income due to the lack of jobs her husband was getting as a self-employed builder and his poor management of money. Donna felt that she "*should be contributing*" (DI3P6L25). In this way Donna could be viewed as having conformed to the characteristic often associated with working class women of helping out financially in times of need. This can, however, be viewed as a reasonable response considering the financial circumstance of the family. This highlights that assumptions cannot be reduced simply to applying equally to all working class women which tends to be reflected within widening participation policy. Donna was receiving glowing reports from the placement she had in a local primary school yet she was frustrated that she was unable to take the temporary part time hours offered to her by the school as she did not have a child care qualification. She enrolled on the Children's Care, Learning and Development course (NVQ CCLD level 2 and 3) alongside the foundation degree in order to gain a licence to practice. Her intention was to work part time alongside study. Donna withdrew from the foundation degree and the Learning and Development course during December. She had been offered a full time job in a factory making LED lamps. The factory was across the road from her house and as a non-driver this work was very convenient. My first concern was for Donna and the fact that she had wasted another year by failing to complete another course yet leaving a course should not 'invariably be seen as a sign of failure, either on the part of the individual or on the part of the institution' (McGivney, 2007, p. 169.). Donna had in fact achieved a lot. In leaving the foundation degree to begin a full time job Donna would have her own money, with this came independence and some control.

In the women adapting their plans and in coping with the barriers to education that they faced, the class and gender inequalities that created the issues in the first place were not

addressed by the women. In this way difficulties were 'accepted as part and parcel of their return to education' and continued to be reinforced thorough everyday life (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998, p. 97.).

"...my husband is the primary carer but I still have overall responsibility for organising everything that happens in our house, and it may sound very stereotypical but generally I think women are the organisers and we can juggle things. I think men would find this more difficult to do" (BI2P4L18).

The pressure to conform to the characteristic associated with working class women of good wife and mother (Purvis, 1995) came from a range of sources.

"there's more pressure on women to be around for the kids, but I don't think that's always necessarily men that put that pressure on. I think we put that pressure on ourselves, and I think women put a lot of pressure on other women as well; you've got to be everything haven't you these days? If you are not going out working you are lazy, if you are out all day and working you're neglecting your kids, so you can't win" (DI1P7L5).

Data from my study is beginning to suggest fault lines running through the low aspiration assumption that underpins widening participation policy. I suggest these are unrealised aspirations rather than low aspirations, some shared similarities rather than as a homogeneous group, less likely to study *solely* to 'increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake' (Dearing, 1997, p. 72) rather than less likely and fluctuating self-esteem and inconsistent or adequate support structure rather than a lack of academic skill. The next section of this chapter will consider how much of the women's experience of education can be explained by place and the relationship between this and the aspiration fallacy.

5.4 Research question 2 – To what extent can the women’s experiences of education be explained by place?

It is important to define the term *place* in this research question in order to position the women within my study. Firstly, the term *place* refers to the geographical locations of Ramsbridge and Ramsbridge College where the women live and study. Secondly, the term *place* is used in the context of belonging. This context implicates key aspects of my theoretical frame, in particular, *community of practice* (Wenger 2008) and *field* (Bourdieu 1990). I argue that the women in this study share a community of practice and that the foundation degree course can be viewed as a field. Thirdly, the term *place* is used in the context of *mindset* and refers to attitudes and beliefs the women hold about themselves, what they are capable of achieving and how they learn (Dweck, 2012). This thesis considers whether geographical place can have an impact on mindset.

In having a concentration of a particular type of education within a particular location, Ramsbridge College is reinforcing the implicit assumption underpinning widening participation policy that different classes require a different type of education. In providing access to a restricted choice of courses, equality of educational opportunity is not achieved within Ramsbridge. In order to fulfil their initial aspirations to become a nurse, a teacher or a lawyer the women would have had to move away to study. However, they needed to stay within Ramsbridge due to work commitments or family pressures. As a consequence, the women had a restricted choice of educational opportunities available to them. In coming back into education as mature students the women’s choices were further constrained. The type of education provider and programme available was vocation based as A-levels tend to be made available as a progression route for school leavers. Widening participation policy has long supported a ‘need for a variety of institutions’ (Robbins, 1963, p. 8.) and this variety is reflected in how institutions differ depending on location, the ‘nature of the work done’ and how ‘appropriate’ it was to the work (Robbins, 1963, p. 9.). The aim of

colleges is to 'serve local needs' and to fulfil the perceived growing demand for vocational, professional and industry-based higher education (Robbins, 1963, Dearing 1997, DfES 2003.).

The foundation degree at Ramsbridge College was viewed as "*very convenient*" (BI1P1L28), supporting the suggestion that working class women choose a course that fits in with work and 'family commitments' (Edwards, 1993, p. 54.). Some confidence in and experience of the subject area was also a factor in choosing to study on the foundation degree. The women who aspired to become teachers would have considered studying the more direct four year primary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) route than the foundation degree yet this option was not available to them. Other women liked the idea of taking a step at a time. This is a significant point. The types of opportunities that are on offer to the women is crucial. The foundation degree opens up possibilities that have not existed before. Making the decision to enter higher education was important for the women and not taken lightly. Viewed as 'culturally alien' and experiencing low self-esteem working class women can have more to lose by entering higher education (Robertson and Hillman, 1997, p. 108.). These feelings are compounded by the humiliation and the fear of humiliation if they fail or have to withdraw (Reay 1997, Plummer 2000, Quinn 2004b, Leathwood and Read 2010). The women saw enrolling on a foundation degree rather than an honours degree as a way to test out if they were capable of studying at a higher level:

"I...prefer the sound of the foundation degree and doing it step by step rather than actually committing to a full degree" (AI1P4L35).

Through this strategy the women adopted a 'self-accepting' stance where protecting personal self-esteem levels mattered more than 'short term discomfort or pain' (Branden 1994, p. 304.). The developing confidence that the women experienced from taking these small steps motivated them to keep going. The importance of such small steps to the women which are very evident in my study can easily get lost in larger studies and during

the creation of policy. The recognition of such small steps means that I am painting a richer picture so that the reality for those women can be understood.

Some of the women would have considered studying at a university had the foundation degree not been available at Ramsbridge College and if family or work commitments had not prevented them from doing so. Even without these barriers some women would still have been unable to study out of town due to lack of finance. Annie and Chloe had aspirations of becoming teachers. On completion of the foundation degree they went on to complete the BA ‘top up’ course with a view to progressing onto the Primary PGCE out of town. Neither of the women went on to do this despite their confidence to do so. Family commitments and pressures again were a barrier. These were a factor for Chloe who also failed to achieve the degree classification required to progress. Some assignments received lower than expected grades and an option to retake or upgrade was not available from the university. This shows that despite returning to education, finding an alternative route to study, increasing levels of self-esteem, hard work and sacrifice some working class women do not fulfil their aspirations. In stating that ‘people respond to opportunities that are available to them’ some commentators suggest that if higher education is made available to those who have been unable to access it in the past then participation rates will increase (Dearing, 1997, p. 101.). Although supporting this view, the focus of my study is in illuminating participant experience. When the BA course was introduced to Ramsbridge College students from the foundation degree progressed onto it. This was true of the 2011/2012 cohort. Only one student however went on to further study on completion of the BA ‘top up’ course. This student went on to complete the primary PGCE and gained a “*distinction grade*” (FGE2L1), she is now seeking employment. Living at home, not having children or having to work while studying were factors viewed by this student as contributing to her successful completing of the PGCE. Delivering the final year of the

Primary PGCE at Ramsbridge College would enable those students unable to travel out of town due to family and work commitments to study locally, however dependence on local study and constrained choice would also be reinforced.

Of the women that I interviewed only Donna had travelled out of Ramsbridge to study in a traditional university prior to starting the foundation degree. This enabled her to talk from experience rather than hearsay or through preconceived ideas. Donna would not travel to study again in the near future due to her negative experience. If the foundation degree had not been available at Ramsbridge College then she would have chosen a different course “*in a different subject area*” (DI2P4L25). This could highlight a lack of clear aspiration and support the assumption that working class students have vague future orientation (Greenbank, 2009). While this may be true for some, my research shows it is a lack of variety in available higher education provision that is also a factor. Donna would not have continued to pursue education if it had not been important to her to do so. In thinking from their “*position*” (CI1P3L33) and experience, some women viewed studying at a traditional university campus in a city as alien to them:

“You get frightened to leave what you know, so I think that’s the big thing with this town...it’s like a little bubble here” (DI1P19L17).

The women often justified why they were studying at Ramsbridge College rather than at a university. The majority of working class students highlight a ‘combination of location and financial reasons’ for choosing to study locally due to work constraints (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, p. 111.). At forty three years old Beth has resigned herself to the fact that she needed to study locally due to family and work commitments and mental ill health and was “*grateful*” (BI1P13L13) for the opportunities she was offered.

“once I’ve got to my time of life I’m doing this degree here. I’m happy with the opportunities I’m being given and at the end of the day it would be up to me to sell what I can do not a case of well oh I got my degree from this university. I think age makes...a massive difference to how much you can get out of a foundation degree. Whether it’s this is the ‘last chance saloon’ attitude or...I don’t know”

(BI1P13L13).

It has been suggested that further education colleges can no longer be viewed as second class, a place where students go if they cannot get into their first choice or do not know what to do next as foundation degrees are ‘intended to make a valuable contribution to lifelong learning’ (QAA, 2004, p. 5.). The women tended to be aware of some of the tensions within higher education. Beth thought whether a course was delivered in a college or a university should be “irrelevant” (BI1P13L5). I agree but it is clear that further education continues to be viewed as inferior to a traditional university education, as Beth explains:

“I still think it’s seen as a second-class education...redbrick universities will always come out as that’s the better quality degree, but I think it’s completely unfair...this is so much harder than going off to university full-time because you’ve got everything else to do...I do think it’s seen very much as the old polytechnic type root and it’s a very working class town and it’s almost like well what sort of people would do a degree like that?...my personal view is that anybody who does any sort of part-time study and comes out with the equivalent qualification has probably worked harder to get it” (BI2P4L32).

Studying higher education in further education emphasises a ‘primary sense of identification as local, working class and at college’ (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, p.

115.). A range of factors including the costs of education, the juggling of work, family and university and the attendant psycho-social pressures are highlighted within education research (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010).

The assumption that working class students are a homogeneous group (Dearing 1997, DfES 2003, HEFCE 2007) and can be treated as such is called into question by the responses of the women when asked about the openings that the foundation degree delivered at Ramsbridge College offered them. For some women this meant that they did not have to find a different route to study in order to still pursue their goal. For Annie this meant that her needs as a mother and carer were accommodated. Others such as Beth were able to study when otherwise for reasons of lack of confidence they would not have been able to do so and for some women like Chloe it meant that plans to study the foundation degree did not need to be postponed until her baby daughter was *“in senior school”* (CI1P1L17) so she could travel to study. These examples show that these women do have aspiration yet these are thwarted by lack of support with childcare or low self-esteem. This highlights again that support structure is often an issue for the women.

The foundation degree offered at Ramsbridge College is structured in a way to accommodate the needs of the women. I have to be careful as to not patronise the women to a degree that I believe I understand the extent of these needs, instead that this change in course structure came about as a result of listening to the concerns that the women had:

“if it wasn’t for the college being as it is and me living where I am, I wouldn’t have had the opportunity, and I’m glad I did” (AI4P5L41).

Students attend class on just one day a week. Part-time and full-time students attend the first two sessions of the day, full-time students stay on for a third session. The day of the

week that the students begin the course on stays the same until they complete. This enables students to make long term plans:

“...when I came in and spoke to you [about] the way the course is done...I will be on a Thursday forever...when I am working...that means I can plan that in and school can plan that in” (BI1P8L12).

The first class begins at 9:30am to enable students to drop children off at nursery or school. Doing this shows that the college is responding to the priority the women placed on meeting their children's needs. For Chloe and Donna child care was their sole responsibility. Child care tended to be the responsibility for both Annie and Beth; however they could call on their partner/husband for limited help during times of real need:

“The later start, that means I can drop the kids off, so it all revolves around my children and my family life” (AI2P10L11).

“it was just going to be so much easier because I was thinking in my head how am I going to get to [city] for 9 o'clock in the morning when I've got [daughter] to sort out, where am I going to put her”? (CI1P1L7).

Each module session runs for two hours. Although the women's day is shorter than some of their counterparts in other colleges within the partnership, they still receive the same number of contact hours. I visit the women within the workplace; this is where I conduct most tutorials. Most colleges within the partnership are unable to allocate hours to visit students in the setting due to staffing and financial constraints. For those colleges that do, the role is generic and the staff, who are often assessors, visit students across different subject areas. I argue that in gaining a holistic understanding of the women studying on the foundation degree, I am in a better position to support their needs. As programme leader I am reinforcing the view often associated with working class women that study should not

disrupt everyday life. If I did not plan this way the women would find it difficult to attend. In providing access to higher education in this way the foundation degree provides openings which enable the women to respond to some aspects of their lives.

Beth explained the problems of studying out of Ramsbridge:

“Lectures were going to be from 1:00 until 6:00 pm which meant I could work in the mornings – just about, travel to [city] but then it would be 6:00pm, if you finished on time. Then I would come home probably miss putting the kids to bed and then have to fit everything else in as well...and I just thought the time I’m going to spend, if I’m lucky an hour and a half but probably two hours travelling, where I probably could be doing something constructive” (BI1P8L20).

Foundation degree students find and negotiate the practical element of the course if they are not already working with children or young people. This tends not to place particular demands on students as they have contacts either through their children, family, friends or school they attended. This encourages students to be independent and develops communication skills. The flexibility in course provision offered on the foundation degree reduces the likelihood of staff ‘inadvertently discriminating, for example, against students with caring responsibilities’ (FHEEHRC, 2011, p. 44.).

“If I’d been placed in a setting that maybe [wasn’t] very understanding about home commitments it might have been more difficult...or if I’d been placed in a setting that wasn’t suited to what I’m learning or to what I want to do...that might not have worked. I’m on hand if the kids need me – I don’t have that worry because that would worry me if I wasn’t in town and something happened. I would probably feel very guilty and blame myself – I’ve got enough guilt I don’t need any more” (AI2P9L8).

Class sizes on the foundation degree are smaller than on higher education programmes delivered in traditional universities. Eighteen students started the first year of the 2011/2012 cohort of foundation degree:

“...if I knew that I would get like the smaller group and the more help I would try harder to get here I think. If I knew there was going to be that difference then I would have made more effort to get here rather than there” (CI1P2L4).

Working class students are more likely to have aspirations of attending post 1992 universities than their middle class counterparts who tend to prefer to study with people from a similar background (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010). The suggestion that ‘traditional university was not meant for people like them’ (Bowl, 2003, p. 64.) was felt by Donna who was *“a bit lost”* (DI1P2L1) when she studied out of Ramsbridge. Some women felt that they had *“every right”* (FG1P3L10) to access traditional university education and assert *“I don’t think it matters where...you come from”* (FG1P3L10). Some of the women felt they were more suited to studying in a college as they would be more *“comfortable”* (AI1P4L3). How working class students view themselves and are viewed by others in terms of their learner class and identities is influenced by the educational institution where they study. In feeling ‘less conspicuous and isolated’ studying within a further education college students reinforce their identity as other (Bowl, 2003, p. 65.). This may be the case for some however Donna explained the value of studying in a college:

“I’m more of a small...place type of person...I do tend to feel out of my depth. I think a lot of people do don’t they, sort of do well in smaller groups and things? I suppose it’s...like kids...when you’re teaching at school? Smaller groups, you can get through better and people open up more, and that’s what I find here” (DI1P15L11).

In this way the term *place* is used in the context of belonging as the women share a community of practice though the field of the foundation degree offered at Ramsbridge College (Wenger, 2008). The term *place* is also used in the context of *mindset* as the attitudes and beliefs the women hold about themselves, what they are capable of achieving and how they learn (Dweck, 2012.).

Education research highlights that despite working class students often being the ‘most motivated and successful of students’ (Quinn, 2004b, p. 64.) the higher education institutes with the best records of promoting widening participation also tend to have the lowest retention rates (HEFCE, 2006). In contrast at the end of year one, the foundation degree had 100 per cent retention and achievement. Each woman felt like a “*very different person*” (CI3P6L17) by the end of year one of the foundation degree. Chloe was employed as a teaching assistant, she felt very proud that “*someone actually wants to pay me for doing something for them that I was doing for free!*” (CI3P6L30). The women had to cope with a range of emotions as their knowledge and skills developed. Studying on the foundation degree brought many changes for Beth:

“education has liberated me in lots of ways and accepting me being...not just who I am but who I want to be. This is who I am, I am not perfect, nobody is, but I like who I really am. I think the balance has come back into my life” (BI5P6L19).

Beth took herself out of a relationship which lacked consistent and adequate support and intellectual stimulation. She made it clear during interview that it was “*not the doing*” (BI5P3L13) of the foundation degree that brought her marriage to an end but rather that the experience had been “*a positive in proving to me that...it’s not working, that we shouldn’t be together*” (BI5P3L13).

For some women those feelings of elation and sense of achievement while studying on the foundation degree were often promptly squashed. Donna suggested that this was in part:

“just a working class thing...when you start achieving people think that you’re getting above yourself...it’s hard knowing where to fit in because...I don’t always feel like I fit in...I felt like I didn’t really fit because there’s a lot of middle class...but then I don’t feel like I always belong to the working class either”

(DI2P6L30).

Working class women are less likely to become employed in a job that requires a degree (ONS, 2013b). After completing the foundation degree, Annie progressed onto the BA ‘top up’. Unable to travel out of town to complete the primary PGCE Annie changed her teaching focus and enrolled on the Initial Teacher Education course at Ramsbridge College with the aim of teaching in post compulsory education. Annie withdrew at the end of semester 1 due to family commitments and was back at home as a full time mum and carer. Chloe is working as a care assistant. Beth is currently studying on the BA ‘top up’ course. She is still studying for *its own sake* and has no intention of progressing onto the primary PGCE. Donna was back in Ramsbridge College on a nursing course through a different university partnership, she withdrew before Christmas. The women appear to be back in the same place as when they started the foundation degree in 2011. None of the women will repay their loans as they earn less than £21,000. In the case of Beth and Chloe completing the foundation degree means they are a better qualified workforce yet neither are in employment that requires a higher qualification. The next section of this chapter will consider how the women’s experiences of education could shape practice in Ramsbridge College in the future.

5.5 Research question 3 – How can the women’s experiences of education shape practice in a further education college?

The assumption of low aspiration is derived in part from the notion that working class students are more likely to lack academic skills than their traditional counterparts (European Commission 1993, DfES 2003). Both Chloe and Beth aspired to become teachers. Beth was told that there was “*no point going into teaching*” (BI1P1L10) and Chloe had the experience of “*nobody*” thinking she “*could actually become a teacher*” (CE1L5). These are just two examples from my study of how explicit assumptions underpinning policy were evident in practice. The women had been given poor careers advice in the past. Those in positions of authority, such as teachers, made assumptions about the women’s academic ability. Those professionals in a position to motivate and provide careers advice had low aspirations for the women. This had a negative impact on the women’s levels of self-esteem:

“At secondary school I would have loved someone to encourage me to believe that I could do it and I think perhaps that’s what was missing [later on]” (BI5P5L29).

It is important that all advice provided by both teaching and support staff within Ramsbridge College, from initial advice and guidance through to exit tutorials is accurate and without prejudice in order to prevent individuals from being misinformed or from becoming de-motivated. An informed two way conversation setting out clear targets and expectations which are reviewed on a regular basis is at the heart of this.

Low self-esteem meant that some of the women relied on and were often swayed by the views of others. Beth and Chloe were influenced by their peers. The women had often made choices that they had regretted, and often did not see their plans through to completion. At the end of the first year of the foundation degree these women felt less likely to “*be swayed as much*” (DI3P9L23) by others. It is important that students have the

opportunity to reflect on and discuss both their own and others views and actions and to consider *what next?* in order to increase self esteem levels so they have the confidence and ability to make more informed choices. This is not common practice within the college; a more traditional approach means that tutors tend to dominate the teaching, learning and assessment process. Students are dependent on the tutor, their talk and their production of numerous handouts, students are spoon fed and surface rather than deep learning takes place. My pedagogy addresses this by providing the opportunity for students to be active in the teaching, learning and assessment process rather than being passive. Students are encouraged to have an input and influence how and what they learn they share their experiences, voice their opinions and challenge assumptions and language, building up a bank of strategies to help them do so.

Language such as *non traditional*, *sub degree* and *top up* were viewed by some women as negative. This reinforced the inferiority felt by some women about studying in a further education college rather than a university. One woman admitted “*I say I am studying at [name of university] because it sounds better*” (FG1P5L3). This was explained by the response received from some friends and family:

“*when I say...I’m doing a foundation degree, [they say]...aw, just at college...and...go, “alright”, whereas if you say I’m at the university of [name]...they say, “oh right!”...which kind of upsets me because I’m not working less hard than people do who go to [city]”* (CI1P2L47).

In discussing education policy and in encouraging students to relate it to their own experiences, an awareness of tensions and inequalities based on class and gender is developed. Students can use this knowledge to promote understanding and challenge assumptions within their own family and workplace:

“the staff meeting yesterday, people’s perceptions are very tunnel vision...one of our little boys at school was diagnosed with Tourettes and a member of staff said “ooh we’ll be waiting for the effing and the jeffing” and I said well actually that’s not where it starts and because we have been doing things and looking into them you know more and you can advise as well as sit back and listen and be able to do that with a little bit more confidence than before” (FG1P2L12).

Education for most of the women had been local, they had limited or no experience of a traditional university. They tended to have misconceptions such as *“lots of dark wood and leather and lots of books” (AI2P10L40)*. These students compared the provision available to them at Ramsbridge College with that they had seen in the media or had read about. The women studying on the foundation degree have the opportunity to attend an induction at the university with the rest of the colleges from the partnership at the beginning of year 1. Most of the women studying at Ramsbridge find it difficult to attend this event if it is not on the day they would normally be in class due to work and family commitments. The partnership staff development day highlighted the need to develop a wider community of practice (Wenger, 2008) within the university partnership where students would have the opportunity to increase knowledge and understanding as well as confidence levels. It was agreed that an end of year conference would be organised to celebrate the foundation degree. This would be held over a couple of days in conjunction with other events at the university and be student led. Students would plan and present at the event and contact possible guest speakers. It was also agreed that the date for the event would set well in advance, transport would be provided by each college and it would take place within college hours so students would be more likely to be able to attend.

The women studied on the foundation degree at Ramsbridge College as it was local and the flexibility of the course fit around their personal lives. The structure of the course relates to

place as it is tailored to accommodate the needs of the local students, employees and employers. For some students this means that they only lose one day's pay in order to attend the course. Elements of the course such as start times and length of lunch break are open to negotiation at the beginning of each new cohort as is the running order and some of the content of lessons, there are no evening classes and the college class day determined with each new cohort remains throughout the course. These strategies are used initially to accommodate the needs of the women yet *a student centred approach* also provides ownership and opportunities for the women to develop confidence and independence (Mezirow, 1997) and retention improves. An approach to teaching, learning and assessment that is not student centred will impact on the access some individuals have to study. I promote a student centred and transformatory approach to teaching, learning and assessment. In my role as staff learning coach I support colleagues to improve retention, achievement and student experience by suggesting strategies to try and adapt and in encouraging colleagues to reflect in order to improve future practice. DEREK (Define, Explain, Reflect, Evaluate, Create) is a learning and teaching strategy (see appendix 17) that I created to support a transformatory approach to learning both for tutors and students. Students can use DEREK as a guide and check during assignment planning (see appendix 22) and tutors can use DEREK to support session planning (see appendix 25).

The women had experienced repeated educational failure prior to starting the foundation degree. Ensuring that the women had the opportunity to succeed and for them to be in control of that helped to develop levels of self-esteem and the motivation to continue:

“every time I talk to you about something that I’ve done or something that we’re working on, it gives me a push forward to achieve more because I know that you think I can achieve more, so I am determined to achieve” (AI2P2L44).

Viewed as individuals and equals on the foundation degree rather than as a homogeneous group the women had some control over and input into course design and delivery, this is a practice that I am promoting within Ramsbridge College. During week 1 of year 1 of the foundation degree for example the students complete a topics and order group task for the Self and Study module. This activity highlights what topics and order are important to the students which can often be different to that prepared by the tutor. A voting system is made available to the students through the VLE so students can decide the topic of the following session and feedback is provided through student liaison meetings. The students were expected to share their experience and opinion and go on to carry out further research in the areas that are of particular interest or of relevance to them, involved in peer assessment and observation within the workplace, class discussion and having a choice of assessment and assessment topics are all strategies which helped to develop the women's employability skills and self-esteem levels so they *"have got the confidence now to get on with it and do what [they are] doing"* in the workplace (FG1P2L30). The students were also expected to carry out further research in the areas that are of particular interest or of relevance to them and carried throughout the course:

"...I like the way we work here. I like the fact we are given a taster and you go off and find out as much as you want, I think that's the level we should be at if we're linking practice to theory...you need to find your little bit about it" (BI2P7L21).

The design and delivery of the foundation degree curriculum supports the development of self-esteem levels as the women take more responsibility for their own learning. Speaking to each student one to one each week compared with the recommended number of tutorials of one per student per semester made by the university was an important strategy to maintain and improve attendance, retention and attainment. The women only attend class one day a week; it is within those seven days before returning to class that a student can have decided that they cannot continue on the course due to the barriers they face. In

adopting a student centred approach within the foundation degree and across Ramsbridge College self-esteem levels of students will develop and learning will become more individualised. Attendance, retention and achievement will also improve. Target setting and action planning are a key element of the foundation degree; this is an example of the pedagogy I am promoting within Ramsbridge College. Students discuss and set their own individual long and short targets which are reviewed half way through each semester. I created an individual session plan (see appendix 20) in order to provide structure and purpose to the phase of some class sessions where students are able to have a choice on what they work on.

The women accessed resources out of class via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This enabled them to catch up or get ahead if they knew they were going to be facing a difficult or busy period in their life or extend their learning:

“I’m on the VLE all the time...there is always something I haven’t read, you can look back on the work you’ve done...and maybe get some ideas that you didn’t in the classroom, you can revisit what you did in the classroom and get some different perspectives on it” (AI2P9L33).

The VLE was also used for flipped learning, where students were able to get to grips with a topic or complete a task before coming in to class the following week (Mazur, 1997). This meant that some women felt more confident about participating in class discussions. The predominant use of the VLE by tutors within Ramsbridge College is for storing information files such as class handouts. This system is useful for those students who have been absent from class or who have mislaid their handouts however it is passive and does not enhance the student experience. I am trying to promote a more active use of the VLE as experienced by the women in my study through sharing my pedagogy during coaching and staff development sessions.

The women had experienced a lack of consistent and adequate support where *“it just didn’t feel like I could just go and talk to somebody as easy as I can here”* (D1P2L11). In offering support opportunities from a range of sources, for example, through regular one to one tutorials, email and through workplace visits the women were more likely to be able to cope with the demands of studying and family life.

The women felt a sense of ‘camaraderie’ (NUS 2012, p. 21.) through the *“constant support”* (CI1P2L9) they received from their peers and from colleagues in the workplace. This support was strong and effective. Although the women were juggling busy working and personal lives there were some support mechanisms in place that were enabling them to remain motivated and keep their future career goals in mind. The women enjoyed the social aspects of education and the *“whole atmosphere of being in a room full of people that are learning, all of whom have got their own problems, their own lives to deal with”* (AI2P8L28). The women found strength in the ‘element of being in the same boat’ (Wright, 2011, p. 136.). In developing a community of practice (Wenger, 2008) students are more able to cope with the demands of family, work and study.

Knowledge and skills developed by the women studying on the foundation degree were transferred to the workplace:

“I speak out in meetings definitely more, I never did, I would go into meetings about the children and I would be the one taking notes because I wouldn’t dare say anything and we have had a meeting about one of our children with the head and the deputy and speaking about my viewpoint which I would never have dared do before...it makes me feel good” (FG1P2L32).

Beth felt that her developing confidence and *“having an understanding of the theory behind the practice”* (BI5P3L20) had *“inspired”* (BI5P3L23) her to change how she

delivered the curriculum. Beth set out to develop a strong sense of community within the classroom where the children were encouraged to “*develop pride*” (BI5P3L37), “*think more*” (BI5P3L45) and “*value...education, for education’s sake*” (BI5P5L14). The move towards a transformative model of education where a more creative and student-centred approach to curriculum design and delivery is embedded will enable students across Ramsbridge College to develop transferable skills.

5.6 Summary and conclusion

Similarities and differences between the women helped me to understand who foundation degree students are, their attitudes towards education and how place impacted on the stories they told. This in turn will inform future practice within the college regarding the recruitment, retention and support of students. The final chapter of my thesis will present the conclusions and recommendations from my study.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Introduction to chapter

The final chapter begins by addressing each research question in turn. Discussion of the relationship between data gathered and the literature reviewed then enables conclusions to be drawn. Recommendations relating to professional practice within Ramsbridge College are presented next. Topics for future research as a result of the study are set out before the chapter closes with reflections on the process of completing the thesis and the impact to my personal and professional practice.

6.2 Discussion of findings in relation to research question 1 -

How do the women's experiences of education reflect and challenge the assumptions underpinning widening participation policy?

The assumptions underpinning widening participation policy tend to group people with a working class background as a homogeneous group (Dearing 1997, HEFCE 2007). Policy makers need to revise these assumptions as they do not always accurately reflect reality. Even with the relatively small sample in this study similarities and differences between the women are apparent.

Most of the women were the first in their family to study at a higher level. In studying on the foundation degree the women have increased the number of 'under-represented groups' specifically from 'socio-economic groups I to V' within higher education yet working class women continue to be under represented within higher education (Dearing, 1997, p. 6.).

Assumptions underpinning policy tend to position working class women as wanting to study at a higher level and as able to pay for fees and extra costs such as child care. Those who do not participate within higher education are viewed as having low aspirations (Dearing 1997, DfEE 1998a, DfES 2003a, DfES 2004a, Francis 2006, Milburn 2010, Brown 2011). On the contrary the women in my study had clear and often high aspirations growing up. Calls to 'change people's aspirations' in order to improve social mobility is not an accurate enough objective (DBIS, 2010 p. 3). I suggest instead that the education system should support students to be able to fulfil their aspirations by providing clear and well informed advice, guidance and ongoing support which is impartial, honest and realistic.

The Dearing Report views working class women as less likely to 'increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake' (Dearing, 1997, p. 72). All four women were studying in part to do this but not solely due to the focus of future employment and the need to contribute to family finances.

Fluctuating levels of self-esteem and the demands made by family, work and study made life hard for the women. Although they did not tend to 'lack a support structure' as suggested in some policy (European Commission 1993, DfES 2003b), they did lack consistent and adequate support. The women's lives were continually changing; they tended not to dwell on the past but instead renegotiated their original plans or changed direction. They were very much solution people, resourceful and resilient. A strong support structure provided by peers, work colleagues and the foundation degree programme reassured and guided the women and levels of self-esteem and independence developed.

Recommendation 1

Change Ramsbridge College strategic aim 2 from *'provide high quality inclusive education which raises individual aspirations, creates opportunities and promotes personal development and progression'* to *'provide high quality, inclusive education which creates opportunity, promotes personal development and progression and supports individual aspiration'*.

6.3 Discussion of findings in relation to research question 2

To what extent can the women's experiences of education be explained by place?

There are tensions and paradoxes that are inescapable for the women. The opportunity to study for a foundation degree at Ramsbridge College is simultaneously an opportunity and a limitation, firstly, an opportunity because this option was not previously possible and secondly, a limitation because foundation degrees are aimed at particular students and not others.

Courses provided in colleges tend to be vocational, where non-traditional students such as working class women are exposed to a restricted choice of courses and therefore opportunities. The women felt they had every right to attend a traditional university if they chose to. Work, family and financial constraints meant that the women studied locally, the women took advantage of this as there was no point in *"throwing another spanner in the works"* (FG1) by travelling out of Ramsbridge to study. Traditional university is a 'culturally alien terrain' for many working class women as many have no one in their family or within their circle of friends who have accessed it (Robertson and Hillman, 1997, para 12.). Despite this some working class women do go on to study in a traditional university. For Donna it did not work out. Some women would have tried to study in a

traditional university had they been younger and without children or if they did not have work commitments. Some women such as Chloe and Annie would be unable to pursue their goal to become a primary teacher if they are unable to study locally. Progression opportunities are also often constrained where those students who gain entry qualification to progress on to courses such as primary teaching are unable to do so as they are unable to travel to study.

The patriarchal gendered roles associated with those with a working class background continued for some. Although often encouraged to study by family and friends, the women knew not to push the desire for independence too far as this tended to result in family conflict. When the impact of study was contained within the boundaries it was more likely to be tolerated. As general levels of self-esteem developed the women began leaning on the boundaries and making their evolving selves known, studying became less about being “*selfish*” (BI2P3L48) and more about “*my study day*” (BI3P5L2).

The foundation degree delivered within Ramsbridge College accommodates some of the needs of the women that study on it such as being able to “*drop the kids off*” (AI2P10L11) at school and pick them up. The design enables women to work, care and study. The women identified themselves as a mother before anything else. I realised that the course design reinforces the patriarchal society view that women can study as long as it does not interfere too much with the role of wife and mother. However it also opens up spaces for the women that otherwise would not have been available such as studying higher education.

Recommendation 2

Promote and provide a progression route within Ramsbridge College from level 3 to the Primary PGCE with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) programme.

6.4 Discussion of findings in relation to research question 3 –

How can the women's experiences of education shape practice in a further education college?

The assumptions underpinning widening participation policy tend to position working class women as lacking the academic skills to be able to study traditional higher education (European Commission 1993, DfES 2003b). In previous experiences of education teachers had tended to have low aspirations for the women. In response the government changed the traditional higher education curriculum. Non-traditional students access a distinct higher education curriculum. Most non-traditional students come to higher education with alternative entry qualifications. The assumptions underpinning widening participation policy suggest working class women are ill prepared for traditional higher education study. Lecturing staff in further education colleges tend to dedicate more time to teaching and pastoral support than those in a university. Many university students face difficulties when trying to get in contact with a tutor (Greenbank, 2009). Further education colleges also provide lower staff to student ratios (Turner, 2009) yet a traditional approach to teaching tends to remain. A traditional delivery of teaching such as a university lecture supports a passive style of learning reliant on tutor as knowledge giver (Freire, 1970). Higher education should translate to a genuine active higher learning where students can understand and 'confront the complexities they face' (Coffield and Williamson, 1997, p. 3.). In promoting a democratic imperative rather than an economic imperative learning can transform. In this way students can become autonomous, reflective and creative.

The women had high aspirations for both their own children and the children and young people that they worked with. They were keen to support the development of self-esteem and independence and challenge inequalities both within the home and the workplace. For Beth this meant planning for a more creative and pupil centred curriculum. The women now looked at others including some family members and friends and could see they were not taking advantage of the educational opportunities that were available. In transforming their own lives the women were able to support others to do the same (Maslow, 1943). I set out to explore how the women's experiences of education could shape future practice in Ramsbridge College. I found that the knowledge and confidence gained from studying on the foundation degree was more far reaching than that as the women went on to challenge inequalities and shape practice in their own homes and workplaces.

Recommendation 3

Promote a transformatory approach to teaching, learning and assessment within Ramsbridge College.

6.5 Conclusion

At the beginning of my research I set out to explore why the foundation degree had been introduced and the factors that underpinned some women's perceptions of education. This led me on to critiquing the assumptions that underpin widening participation policy. What I found was that the debate around the low aspiration theme is more subtle and complex than policy supposes.

The increase in participation of working class women in higher education will remain consistently small despite changes in funding and programme structure while inequality is reinforced and replicated by the everyday language and practices of life. My conclusions

lead to a view that there is a need for society to be committed to the empowerment of women through the development of self esteem, independence and aspiration established within the early years of life and reinforced thereafter. Empowerment enables working class women to recognise their own powers by becoming aware of how the 'power of their understanding has been kept from them' (Burke, 2012, p. 39.).

At the heart of the government's drive to widen participation in higher education is the aim for future economic success through a skilled workforce. Not all women studying for a foundation degree progress on to the BA 'top up' course and become employed in a graduate job. From the eighteen students within the 2011/2012 cohort just one student went on to qualify as a primary teacher. However the experience of completing the foundation degree can support the promotion of lifelong learning. My data shows that the women in my study developed knowledge, understanding and increased levels of self-esteem which is transferrable to the workplace and home. The women also want to become role models to their children. These skills benefit current and future society. Data supports the view that the foundation degree and specifically the way it is delivered in Rambridge College, supports their needs as women. A discussion is also included to support the view that women are different to men and opportunities should be made available to them to enable them to succeed as well.

The concept of choice is a problematic one. It suggests that a course of action has been determined in a fair manner. With a true choice two options are available which are of equal value and an individual will make a decision from an 'at least as good as' choice (Allingham 2002, p.26.). Women and those from non-traditional groups are less likely to experience true choice than men or those from traditional groups and will often have to settle for what is doable over nothing. Childcare remains 'disproportionately performed by

women in the domestic sphere' despite an increase in the number of childcare settings and places available for children from the age of two (Walby, 2011, p.106.). Society needs to change so child care and domestic chores are not viewed as predominately women's work. This would reduce conflict where women experience feelings of guilt or selfishness.

Studying on the foundation degree at Ramsbridge College opens up spaces for the women that tend to be undervalued. The women develop new knowledge, understanding and skills in a safe and encouraging environment, none of the women I interviewed would "*want to go back*" (CI4P3L35) to the lives they had before they embarked on the foundation degree. This crucial point is illustrated in the Baumgardner and Richards quote I have chosen to present at the beginning of my thesis. As levels of self-esteem increased and it became less fragile the women were able to 'embrace the idea' that they could change their lives in some way. They then began 'looking for the tools with which to do so' (Baumgardner and Richards 2010, p. 295.). Conducting my study has informed my understanding of self-esteem levels in the women. I created the *Developing self: a model of mature working class women studying on a foundation degree* (see appendix 18) to show the process of transformation but also to highlight that some conflict and vulnerability remains for the women as they do so. Sharing this model with colleagues teaching on the foundation degree will help to ensure that students are more effectively supported in the future.

Effective foundation degree programmes are creative, uplifting and inspiring. They provide a positive experience for women and consistent levels of general self-esteem increase. Practitioners and researchers should be committed to the empowerment of women through the development of self-esteem established within the early years of life and reinforced thereafter. Practitioners need to listen to students and provide the opportunity for reflective practice, discussion and decision making. A move towards a transformative model of

education where a more creative approach to curriculum design and delivery is developed is required however, the long term benefits of such will remain unrealised as long as the economy remains the government's focal driver of societal change.

I view a transformatory approach to teaching, learning and assessment as being framed by critical reflection where both tutors and students have the opportunity to show, share and develop the knowledge and skills they have in order to make a positive impact on future personal and professional practice. I also view a transformatory approach to teaching, learning and assessment as being strongly framed. Rather than perceiving this as working class students still being viewed as deficient and as placed in a position of dependency (Bernstein 2000, Crozier and Reay 2011) I see having a strong structure as crucial in the way that it must begin from day one of meeting the individual wishing to study, the tutor must be committed to the approach and an informative and supportive structure must be in place to scaffold individual transformation. In my view a transformatory approach provides opportunities for students to have an input and influence how and what they learn and to build up a bank of strategies to help them to do so. In relation to teaching a transformative approach addresses the imbalance of power between tutor and student and in this way students are supported to think about the process of learning in a 'unidirectional' way which is often different to that previously experienced (Freire, 1973 p. 52.). Students are introduced to some strategies, but importantly they are encouraged to share and discuss the strategies they already use and to share and try out new ones. Learning using a transformatory approach is based on choice it is individualised and often student led, for example students use the VLE (virtual learning environment) to vote for the topic of the following session and are encouraged to suggest new topics. Students learn a lot from each other, they are encouraged to share stories and experiences during class discussion and use

critical reflection to consider strengths and what could be done differently next time in a similar situation and to peer observe within the setting.

Assessment is ongoing and begins on day one of meeting a prospective student. At interview students complete a piece of reflective writing, this is given back to them during induction as a homework task which gives them the opportunity to improve it and reflect upon the process, this then becomes their first piece of work for their *self and study* module portfolio. A range of assessment methods including portfolio, presentation, case study and report are used, in some cases the students can choose from a list of assignment titles and in others they choose the context and reflect upon and plan for the setting. The idea that skills are transferable and that education does not remain in the classroom but 'continues in all aspects of a learner's life' (Freire 1987) is key to learning on the foundation degree. Also key to the transformatory approach on the foundation degree is lots of discussion, lots of practice and lots of feedback. Students receive feedback every week in a range of ways such as peer, self, verbal and voice recorded in order to accommodate and challenge learning style, this is then fed into their personal targets and action plans. Traditional written feedback is time consuming for the tutor so I created a coded feedback sheet (see appendix 23) this helps to get feedback back to students in a timely manner. It is important to also include some personalised feedback with this and to be aware that some students may need further clarification during individual tutorial. Feedback on these methods from the students is fed back to me during student liaison meetings and help to improve future practice.

6.6 Future research

The process of conducting the study and writing my thesis has highlighted areas that I would have liked to have developed further as well as possible new topics to research. The following section sets out my suggestions for future research based on my study.

The data gathered from follow up interviews with the women in my study would provide the opportunity to update their stories. Whether the women went on to achieve their goals by choosing a different route, if they went on to further study and their employment status would be determined. One of the aims of higher education is to create a higher qualified workforce. On completion of the foundation degree and for some, the completion of the BA, none of the women in my study were employed in graduate jobs. These stories would further illuminate the possible barriers that the women face and inform discussions about future provision within Ramsbridge College.

Although the numbers of women from working class backgrounds has increased there are many who do not participate within higher education. There are working class women who consider studying at a higher level and get as far as applying for the foundation degree at Ramsbridge College but do not attend interview and there are some who begin the programme of study yet drop out before completion. Exploring the stories of these women would provide a richer picture of the aspirations and the possible barriers that working class women face. This information would also inform future discussions on how to improve retention and achievement within Ramsbridge College.

Exploring the influence of others on an individual's future aspirations and academic progress and attainment would provide a different perspective to my research area. A natural direction from my study would be in exploring the influence of mothers from

working class backgrounds on their children's future aspirations and educational progress or the influence of men on the educational choices working class women make.

6.7 Impact of research on personal and professional practice

As programme leader for the foundation degree I am in a privileged position where I can observe professional and personal transformation in women as their general levels of self-esteem increase. Conducting my study has provided insight and strengthened the commitment I have to social justice within higher education. Higher education should value the learning context and the experience each student brings to it and appreciate the broader contribution that these elements can bring to society as a whole.

A multiple strategy approach is required to challenge existing assumptions within practice as a result of widening policy. Challenging language, power distribution, the deficit model and the meritocratic framework is a long-term commitment and these discussions need to take place at all levels. The knowledge and understanding I have gained from conducting my study has enabled me to develop my own practice. The strategies I have implemented and developed are transferable to other foundation degrees and other courses within Ramsbridge College. The students studying on the foundation degree gain personally and academically. In my role as programme leader I get to know the students studying on the foundation degree well, the women share their experience of the emotional, physical, and organisational effort it takes to be a higher education student, the barriers they face and the anxieties they have.

Working within the constraints of the programme I provide opportunities for the students to make choices where the students begin taking more responsibility for their own learning, drawing on/developing a particular interest throughout the course and developing higher

levels of self-esteem. Their confidence is developed by having these opportunities, voicing their opinions and making mistakes in a safe and supportive environment and through setting and achieving the target they have created. I have developed these areas within the foundation degree *self and study* module since the course was introduced in the college in 2003. I have always thought this module should be yearlong rather than one semester. This change was made when the course was revalidated in 2011. As module leader for *self and study* within the partnership I produced the suggested scheme of work for the revalidation. Following the first moderation of the new foundation degree I delivered a session to the partnership. This emphasised the value of a student-centred approach, teaching of modules in a non-compartmentalised manner and the redistribution of power from tutor to student. I suggest that there is room for a *self and study* approach within a wide range of courses. My pedagogy addresses this. DEREK (Define, Explain, Reflect, Evaluate, Create) is a learning and teaching strategy (see appendix 17) that I created following reflection on my own practice, the work I have done on the *self and study* module for the foundation degree partnership and from relating this to existing theory. Bloom's revised taxonomy is a classification of learning objectives (Anderson et al, 2001). As a planning tool to support transformative learning, I saw Bloom's revised taxonomy as most effective when familiar to both lecturers and students. Bloom's taxonomy can be used to plan for differentiation. Although not ordered hierarchically in terms of difficulty there is a relationship between the levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy (Mazarno and Kendall, 2009). Some understanding of a particular topic needs to be in place before it can be applied to a different situation or evaluated. There is an understanding within transformative learning as with differentiation that not all students will come into a topic with the same prior knowledge. In this way sessions become student led and students become more independent. Bloom's revised taxonomy fails to reinforce that learning is a cylindrical process or that each learning experience does not always begin with level 1, I also found

that students and teaching staff found it difficult to remember the different elements of Bloom's taxonomy, DEREK addresses this because it is an acronym it is more memorable.

I have emphasised a transformatory approach to teaching and learning during the Ramsbridge College staff training sessions I have delivered on planning, differentiation, assessment and feedback. The sessions delivered within the foundation degree partnership and within Ramsbridge College have reinforced my view that misconceptions about particular groups of students continue and underpin the assumptions that shape educational practice. In my role as advanced learning coach I train staff who go on to support colleagues. Members of staff are encouraged to reflect and question their own values, assumptions and practice and to develop a more creative, student centred approach to session planning.

My pedagogy has also been shared with the wider audience. I was invited to speak at the Learning and Teaching conference at the university. Highlighted as an example of good practice I shared my strategies to improve retention and achievement within the foundation degree by adopting a transformative approach to teaching, learning and assessment (see appendix 24).

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Table 1 showing the 1801 – 2001 census of population for Ramsbridge

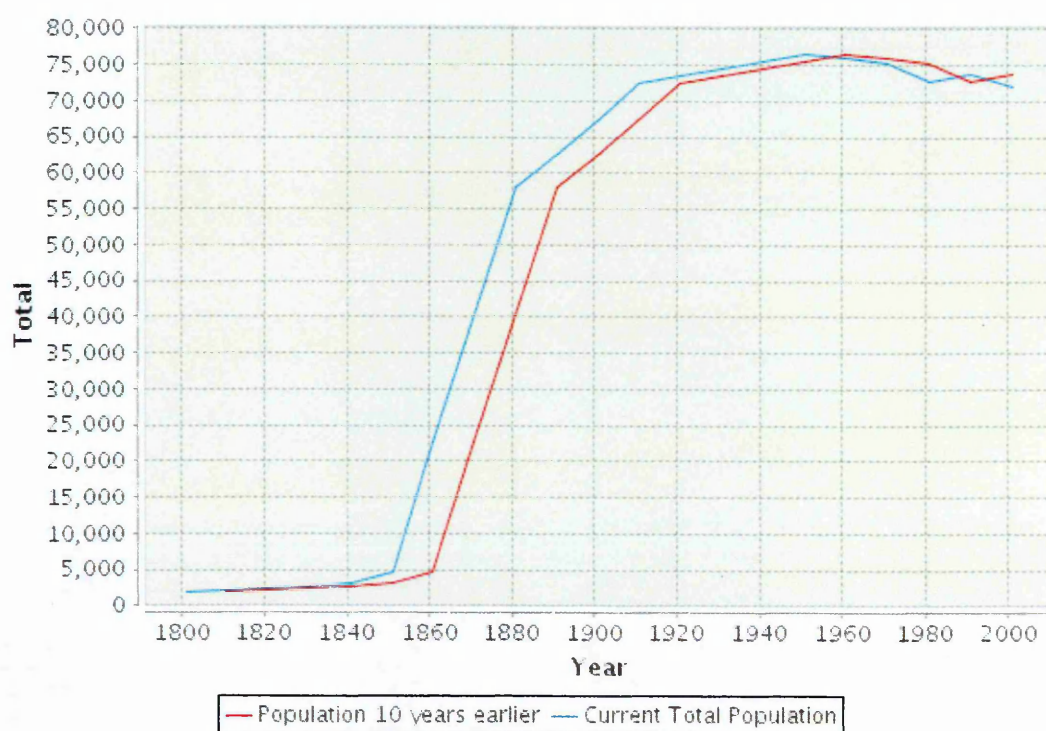
Year	Population 10 years earlier	Current Total Population
1801		1,958
1811	1,958	2,078
1821	2,078	2,451
1831	2,451	2,702
1841	2,702	3,236
1851	3,236	4,684
1861	4,684	22,513
1871	22,513	40,343
1881	40,343	58,172
1891	58,172	62,694
1901	62,694	67,354
1911	67,354	72,360
1921	72,360	73,394
1931	73,394	74,447
1941	74,447	75,509
1951	75,509	76,619
1961	76,619	75,902
1971	75,902	75,192
1981	75,192	72,645
1991	72,645	73,704
2001	73,704	71,979

GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, Ramsbridge District through time | Population Statistics | Total Population, *A Vision of Britain through Time*.

URL: http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10088367/cube/TOT_POP

Date accessed: 04th July 2013

Chart 1 showing the 1801 – 2001 census of population for Ramsbridge



GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, Ramsbridge District through time | Population Statistics | Total Population, *A Vision of Britain through Time*.

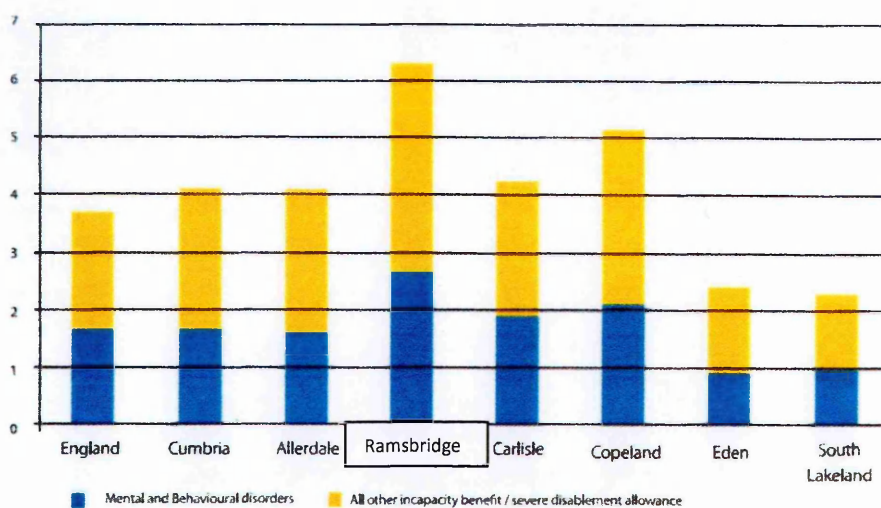
URL: http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10088367/cube/TOT_POP

Date accessed: 04th July 2013

Percentage of the population aged 16+ claiming incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance in 2012

High numbers of people within the county (especially in more deprived urban areas) are out of work because of mental ill health. As figure 20 below shows, rates of benefit claimants both for any condition and for mental health and behavioural conditions are particularly high in Ramsbridge and are also higher than the national average in Allerdale, Carlisle and Copeland.

Figure 20: % of the population aged 16+ claiming incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance



Source: NOMIS, Feb 2012

Table showing the local and unitary authorities with the lowest growth or decline in population, 2001 and 2011

England and Wales local and unitary authorities				
Local or unitary authority	England region or Wales	2001 population (thousands)	2011 population (thousands)	Change since 2001 (per cent)
Ramsbridge	North West	72	69	-4.0
Knowsley	North West	151	146	-3.5
Sefton	North West	283	274	-3.2
Sunderland	North East	285	276	-3.2
South Tyneside	North East	153	148	-3.1
Redcar and Cleveland	North East	139	135	-2.9
Burnley	North West	90	87	-2.8
Kensington and Chelsea	London	162	159	-2.2
Middlesbrough	North East	141	138	-2.0
West Somerset	South West	35	35	-1.1
Hyndburn	North West	82	81	-1.0
St. Helens	North West	177	175	-0.8
	East of			
Tendring	England	139	138	-0.6
Stockport	North West	285	283	-0.5
Blaenau Gwent	Wales	70	70	-0.3
Blackpool	North West	142	142	-0.1
City of London	London	7	7	0.0
Torfaen	Wales	91	91	0.2
Pendle	North West	89	90	0.2
	West			
North Warwickshire	Midlands	62	62	0.3

[1] Comparison with 2001 and 1991 is based on mid-year population estimates for those years, comparison with 1981 and earlier is based on census results.
Source: Office for National Statistics

Tables 1 and 2 showing details of individual and group interviews

Table 1 showing details of individual interviews

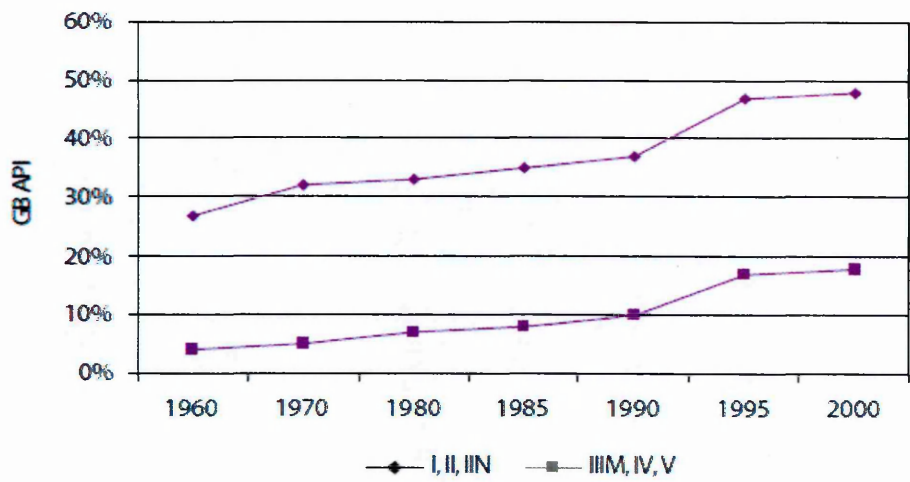
Participant	Interview schedule	Interview focus
<p>Annie</p> <p>Full time student</p> <p>Studied foundation degree over 2 years</p> <p>Completed foundation degree</p> <p>Progressed onto BA (Hons) Education & Professional Studies at Ramsbridge College</p>	<p>Interview 1 9th December 2011 - year 1 semester 1</p> <p>Interview 2 19th March 2012 - year 1 semester 2</p> <p>Interview 3 14th May 2012 - end of year 1</p> <p>Interview 4 21st March 2013 - end of year 2 and foundation degree</p>	<p>Background information about self and journey through education.</p> <p>Family/friend/peer support. Family commitments. Future aspirations. Local/traditional study. Motivation.</p> <p>Reflection on year 1. Role models. Aspirations. Change in relationships.</p> <p>Reflection on year 2. Personal change. Impact of studying the foundation degree on others.</p>
<p>Beth</p> <p>Part time student</p> <p>Studied foundation degree over 3 years</p> <p>Completed foundation degree</p> <p>Progressed onto BA (Hons) Education & Professional Studies at Ramsbridge College</p>	<p>Interview 1 7th December 2011 - year 1 semester 1</p> <p>Interview 2 22nd March 2012 - year 1 semester 2</p> <p>Interview 3 3rd May 2012 - end of year 1</p> <p>Interview 4 22 May 2013 - end of year 2</p> <p>Interview 5 27th March 2014 - end of year 3 and foundation degree</p>	<p>Background information about self and journey through education.</p> <p>How the course fits into family/work commitments. Family/friend/peer support. Local/traditional study.</p> <p>Reflection on year1. Role models. Future aspirations. Motivation. Study time.</p> <p>Reflection on year 2. Change in relationships. Personal change. Future aspirations.</p> <p>Reflection on year 3. Barriers to studying. Impact of FD experience of professional practice.</p>
<p>Chloe</p>	<p>Interview 1 15th December 2011 - year 1 semester 1</p>	<p>Background information about self and journey through education.</p>

<p>Full time student</p> <p>Studied foundation degree over 2 years</p> <p>Completed foundation degree</p> <p>Progressed onto BA (Hons) Education & Professional Studies at Ramsbridge College</p>	<p>Interview 2 12th March 2012 - year 1 semester 2</p> <p>Interview 3 23rd April 2012 - end of year 1</p> <p>Interview 4 14th March 2013 - end of year 2 and foundation degree</p>	<p>Personal change. Local/traditional study. Family/peer support. Role models. Future aspirations.</p> <p>Reflection on year 1. Motivation. Aspirations. Impact on studying the foundation degree on others. Barriers.</p> <p>Reflection on year 2. Personal/professional change. Future aspirations for self and others. Support.</p>
<p>Donna</p> <p>Full time student</p> <p>Studied foundation degree over 2 years</p> <p>Withdrew from foundation degree at beginning of year 2</p> <p>Progressed onto full time employment in an LED light factory</p>	<p>Interview 1 14th December 2011 – year 1 semester 1</p> <p>Interview 2 21st March 2012 – year 1 semester 2</p> <p>Interview 3 9th May 2012 – end of year 1</p>	<p>Background information about self and journey through education.</p> <p>Local/traditional study. Barriers. Peer support. Study time. Future aspirations. Family commitments.</p> <p>Reflection on year 1. Personal change. Role models. Relationships. Aspirations. Study time. Support.</p>

Table 2 showing details of group interviews

Participants	Interview schedule	Interview aim and topic focus
<p>Focus group 1 (FG1)</p> <p>4 women from the 2011/2012 foundation degree cohort</p> <p>2 full time students 2 part time students</p> <p>All 4 women completed the foundation degree</p> <p>2 students progressed onto the BA (Hons) Education & Professional Studies at Ramsbridge College</p> <p>2 students progressed onto full time employment in a nursery/primary school</p>	<p>Interview 1</p> <p>28th February 2013 – year 2 semester 2</p>	<p>The aim of focus group 1 was to test some of the views raised during individual interviews with the main participant group.</p> <p>The women in focus group 1 had characteristics in common with the main participant group:</p> <p>4 women were mature students 4 women were mothers 4 women rented/owned their own home 1 lived within a deprived ward of Ramsbridge 3 had an immediate family member with a disability or a husband/partner with poor health.</p> <p>Topics discussed during the focus group included:</p> <p>Journey through education Employer/family/friends/peer support Barriers to study Aspirations Personal and professional impact of studying on the foundation degree.</p>
<p>Focus group 2 (FG2)</p> <p>2 women from the 2011/2012 foundation degree cohort</p> <p>Both full time students</p> <p>Both women completed the foundation degree</p> <p>Both women progressed onto the BA (Hons) Education & Professional Studies at Ramsbridge College</p>	<p>Interview 1</p> <p>7th March 2013 – year 2 semester 2</p>	<p>The aim of focus group 2 was to:</p> <p>make the interview data more representative of the 2011/2012 foundation degree cohort</p> <p>To test some of the views raised during individual interviews with the main participant group and with focus group 1</p> <p>Hear some different perspectives.</p> <p>The women in focus group 2 had characteristics that were not in common with the main participant group or with the women in focus group 1:</p> <p>2 women were younger students 2 women lived with their parent/s in the family home 2 women had no children.</p> <p>Topics discussed during the focus group included:</p> <p>Journey through education Employer/family/friends/peer support Barriers to study Aspirations Personal and professional impact of studying on the foundation degree.</p>

Higher Education participation rates by social class groups (1960-2000)



DfES (Department for Education and Skills), 2003b. *Widening Participation in Higher Education*. Norwich: HMSO page 7

Megan Attwood

Doctorate in Education (EdD) research study – Exploring Place: Further Education, Working Class Women and a Foundation Degree

Megan has kept me updated on the research that she is conducting through the Open University. Now in her final year the research that she has undertaken will help us as a College understand the attitudes and barriers many of our present and prospective students face. Nationally, recruitment and retention of adults returning to education has been problematic and therefore this research will prove invaluable. It is a timely document as we look at growth of Higher Education on the FE campus.

I have given Megan access to college prospectuses, publicity and statistics and have thoroughly enjoyed our discussions. I look forward to the final study and the work that will follow from Megan's recommendations.


Principal & CEO

Ramsbridge College
Ramsbridge

CONSENT FORM

I have understood the nature of my involvement in the research project. I understand that:

This research project is concerned with exploring students' experiences of studying for a Foundation Degree in the college;

There is no compulsion for me to participate in the research. If I choose not to participate this will not affect my study on my present course at Ramsbridge College in any way or in the future;

If I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw;

If I do decide to withdraw I can request the removal of the data I have supplied today. I understand that I have until **21st March 2013** in order to make that request;

If I choose to withdraw this will not affect my study on my present course in any way or in the future;

Any information that I give will be used solely for the purpose of this research, which may include publications, and no other;

Confidentiality will be respected by the researcher with regard to the information which I give, including the use of codes in order to preserve anonymity.

Signature of student:

Signature of researcher: Meg Attwood

Date: 28th February 2013

CHLOE – Interview 2 (16 minutes 25 seconds)

Meg	Thank you very much. I spoke to you last in semester 1. You've been studying on the Foundation Degree in Children, People and Services, at that time you were working in the Co-op and you were a volunteer in a school.
Chloe	Mm. Mm.
Meg	Can you tell me what's happened since semester 1?
Chloe	Em, just after Christmas we had somebody at school leave, one of the part-time teaching assistants left and the school offered me at first 6 hours and then when I went back to talk to them again they gave me 10 hours of paid work. So I left the Co-op.
Meg	So you are not in the Co-op at all?
Chloe	Nop, not at all. I only did 10 hours in the Co-op anyway, so I thought with 10 hours at school there's no point in doing both and working 7 days a week. So I now do, I am only there Tuesday and a Wednesday morning in school for paid hours.
Meg	And how many days would you have had to have done in the Co-op?
Chloe	Err, it would be Saturday and Sunday 5 hours on each day.
Meg	What difference does that make to you working in the school rather than the Co-op?
Chloe	It's like everything really. I get weekends, coz normally [daughter] would have had to sleep out, em Saturday night and she'd be at one of her grandparents every other weekend. We wouldn't be able to do anything together, coz I'd be in school most of the week and then in the Co-op at the weekend as well. So now we get weekends to ourselves to just do whatever we like.
Meg	So when you were given the news that you'd got the 10 hours at the school, how did that make you feel?
Chloe	Erh absolutely over the moon really. Just that em sort of somebody thought I was doing well enough on placement to consider me for an actual job, to actually pay me for what I was doing, was like a massive, massive confidence boost really. Em ...
Meg	So how long had you been volunteering at the school before they offered you a job?
Chloe	I started in September and I was doing 2 full days a week from September to December and then it was sort of the first week back after Christmas really

	that they offered me it. So I was totally over the moon.
Meg	Are you doing anything different to what you were doing when you were volunteering?
Chloe	Em I have some erh intervention groups of my own to do. They've given me erh 2 basic Maths, basic numeracy groups on a Monday, Tuesday and a Wednesday morning and a basic literacy group, that really is the basics, on a Wednesday afternoon, which is part of my student hours really. But I do that and I do sort of general teaching assistant things. I take groups for em guided reading and listen to the readers and change the books, clearly up, tidying away, that sort of thing. So, yeah.
Meg	Being given hours and paid hours, has that influenced how you work within the school?
Chloe	Em I think I'm a lot more confident at things. I'm a lot more confident with the children on my own at sort of, not discipline's the wrong word, but you know what I mean sort of telling them to sit down, do what they're supposed to be doing. Em, I'm a lot more confident talking to other people in the school like the other teaching assistants and the other teachers. Em, yeah it has, it's just had a completely massive change on ma confidence really, ma confidence has just been boosted so high that somebody would think that I'm doing well enough to consider me to be paid. It's just completely changed everything really.
Meg	Was it a surprise, did it surprise you that you were asked?
Chloe	Em kind of, because I knew [colleague] was leaving and I thought oh if they asked me that would work out quite well and yeah when they did actually ask me, I was, yeah I was quite surprised and very, very happy surprised. So yeah.
Meg	Last time you spoke to me you talked to me about how you had decided to study here in [town] rather than going away. You talked about the difficulties of studying in [city] or [city] and you said "if it was based on distance I would go to whichever is closest, just because it would be far easier. If I knew I would get the smaller groups and the more help I would try my hardest to get here, study here". What are your thoughts about that statement now?
Chloe	Em it would be the same really, with [daughter] being so small, em travelling a distance just wouldn't work out for us at all. Em, it'd just be so hard to get her in nursery, get her picked up and things like that. Em, so yeah it's still the same really.
Meg	Last time you talked about the stigma of studying for a foundation degree here in [town]. You said "people seemed to think it's like you're a better person if you go away and that kind of upset you at the time". How do you feel about that statement now?

Chloe	Yeah. Em, you still get it really if you say to people 'awh I'm doing a foundation degree' they are like 'or where at?' I say awh well it's just at college, people kind of go 'awh right, ok'. They don't take, don't take you very seriously when you say you're doing it whereas I think if you said 'awh yeah I'm at [city] and I have to travel every day' people go 'awh right, yeah'. They don't, well I just feel personally people don't take me seriously when I say I'm doing ma foundation degree, people seem to think that awh it's easy she only goes to college one day a week, it will be nothing this, nothing.
Meg	At the time you said that it upset you. Does that still upset you or does it not bother you anymore?
Chloe	Yeah. It does a bit, but then I think I know how hard I've worked this year, so they can think what they like, because I know I have worked hard and I'm half way there now. So yeah ... it does slightly upset me but most of the time I just think 'oh, think what you like, whatever'.
Meg	So do you think that you would ever consider how you answered people that said that in the future?
Chloe	Em, I don't think I would ever stand up and say anything like, to confront them about it. I just think awh well that's your opinion, if you think that, well she's only going to college, then you can think that. Coz people's opinions of me have never really bothered me. There's only certain things that I've thought I don't want people to think that. But most of the time I do just ignore them and just get on with it.
Meg	Would you ever say, would you ever admit that you weren't actually at college?
Chloe	No.
Meg	You would still say I am studying at college?
Chloe	I'm so proud of myself, the fact that I do go to college, well it's Uni, it's University. It just happens to be at a college really. So no I tell everybody if I get the chance. I would never not tell somebody that I'm doing it, because I just think 'I'm very proud of what I'm doing, I've worked very hard so why should I not tell people'.
Meg	Do you think in the past you would have handled that situation differently?
Chloe	Em, I think when I was younger, if I was doing this now and people had said to me 'awh so you're just going to college one day a week' I would have maybe argued a bit more and said 'well it's not one day a week' and sort of stood up for myself, not stood up for myself a bit more but been a bit more confrontational. But now I just think I've got too much other stuff going on to care what people think.

Meg	Em, last time you were telling me that you've got your own house that you rent and that you live in [town], and you live in [street]. Can you tell me a bit more about where you've lived as you've been growing up?
Chloe	I've always lived here. Em, apart from 1 year when I lived in Scotland, but I can't remember it. Em, I think because I've been in [town] forever really I know, I have worked in quite a few of the schools on placement before I started at my school and I know a lot of the people. In my class alone I know 3 of their parents from school, which is quite strange, so, yeah, I've lived all over [town] really in different houses.
Meg	So can you tell me a little bit about where your parents have lived within the town?
Chloe	Yeah. Err they live erh closer to [school], so they're in quite a posh area really. A big posh house and our house is like a terraced street in the middle of the ghetto of Barrow, that's what we call it, it gets very noisy sometimes of a night time. Eh, but yeah, so I can't wait to move really, but that's sort of in the next few years we do want to get out of where we are now and obviously we're not going to move where they are but on the way out of sort of building up, out of where we are now to somewhere a bit nicer.
Meg	So when the family moved to Scotland for a time, was there a specific reason why you went there?
Chloe	Yeah ma Dad's worked at the yard at the time and he had to go up to Faslane, so he moved to Helensborough. Em, I think I was about, I must have been 4 because I started school there, I started ma first year of school there and my sister was 2 possibly and then we were there for about 18 months, maybe 2 years and then we came back. We went to the same house which I can remember at the time being a bit confusing, I thought how, what, who's been in our house while we've not been there? But yeah.
Meg	Last time you talked about the support and encouragement you've had from your parents, your Mum in particular, to with getting your qualifications and working hard, and you mentioned that your Mum works from home. So can you tell me a little bit about your parents' work and maybe the qualifications that they've got?
Chloe	Yeah. My Mum has got a Webmaster's Degree (I'm sure that's what it's called), em, and she's now doing something else, I don't know what that is. She's always doing things. Em, she works for a company based in Manchester and she builds web pages for clients. Em, so she's got her own little office. Ma Dad, I don't actually think he's got a Degree, but I know he's worked his way up. He might have actually. Em, but he's done all sorts in his time. He's worked in the Yard, he's bin em, err what's it called, a chief proof-reader person for electronic catalogues. He's checked phones and things. He's worked at Sellafield and now he's back in the yard, he's a Commissioning Engineer. So yeah, so they're both pretty high up there. I'm not actually sure

	what ma Dad's done. I know ma Mum makes slightly more money than him, which annoys him. But yeah...
Meg	So has your Mum always done that sort of work?
Chloe	No. Em, she didn't work at all when we were tiny. Up until my sister started senior school. So I was just leaving, I was sort of 15 and Sarah was 12 and that's when she started. She started doing things em with photos and stuff, she worked at the Dock Museum for quite a while. She was restoring old pictures and things on Photoshop or whatever it's called. Em, and then she worked for the Council em doing the Council web page for them, and then she worked at CGP Books doing their graphics and things in there. That's why we boycotted their book though, coz when the SATs got cut she got cut basically and now she does this at home, she loves it because she doesn't have to go anywhere.
Meg	How do you think that the environment that you've grown up in has influenced your outlook?
Meg	Em, well I've sin em sort of, my entire life I can remember my Mum with here stuck in a book doing some sort of Open University course. Em, and I just think well if she can do it I can do it. There's no reason why I can't degrees and things and get myself a nice job. And I think that because up until the age of sort of when I was at senior school we didn't have masses of money and things we always had nice things we went on nice holidays to Florida and things but we weren't sort of, I can remember worrying about things because I knew ma Mum was worried. But then after that, after ma Mum started working, I can remember that everything was rosy and we moved to our nice big house with our garden and we got another car, and yeah I want that. I want, coz I know if I turn round to my Dad tomorrow and said 'Awh, I'm having an emergency, I need some money' he'd say yeah, and I want to be able to know that I can do that for her [looks to daughter]. If she has a drama when she's 18 and she moves, whatever I want to know that I can sort that and I want the big house and the nice car. Because I've sin them do it I know I can do it.
Meg	You said that your future plans were to complete the Foundation Degree, to top up, then the PGCE and then be a teacher. So you're nearly at the end of your first year, have your plans stayed the same or have they changed?
Chloe	No, exactly the same. Yeah, I know I'm 1 year down and 3 to go. Let's just do it, definitely.
Meg	And why have those plans stayed the same?
Chloe	I think it was just what I was supposed to do. I just think in my head now, coz I know with the teaching assistant that I really love it, but there's bin a couple times I've sat in the teacher's chair and I've played with the laptop and things and I've bin in control of the whole class and I've been like 'Yeah this is me,

	I'm in the teacher's chair, I'm the boss' and I've just loved it.
Meg	Are you still prepared to move away to find work?
Chloe	Not too far. Eh, we've looked sort of as far as [city] at house prices and things like that. I wouldn't want to go past there really. Sort of for family reasons, but yeah we would move if we had to. We would.
Meg	You've talked about studying on the Foundation Degree and you said it's hard and but it's not actually as big, bad and scary as you thought. How do you feel about that statement now?
Chloe	No . Em coming to the end of it, cos I've got 3 assignments I need to do, I'm a bit like 'Oh this is quite scary', but it's not anything like I thought it was gonna be. I thought when I first walked in here in September I was 'Oh my word, what have I done, my brain is going to explode', but, coming to the end of the first year now I think I can do this, yes it's hard, yes I have to get ma head in a book and get things done, but I can do it.
Meg	Is there anything else that you want to tell about how your life has changed since starting on the Foundation Degree, or your views about being on the course or studying in [town] rather than moving away?
Chloe	No, I'm pretty sure I made the right choice because I couldn't have gone away, I just wouldn't have had the time or the money to get there, anything like that. So I know I definitely made the right choice. Em, yeah. I'm just looking forward to a bit of a break, get ma head back together, fresh brain ready for September.
Meg	Not many more weeks to go.
Chloe	No.
Meg	Right, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

RAMSBRIDGE COLLEGE – Mission statement

Delivering education and skills to inspire and change lives.

College Values

- Respect
- Diversity
- Excellence

Strategic Aims

1. To provide an inspiring, rewarding, safe and inclusive environment for all learners and staff
2. To provide high quality inclusive education which raises individual aspirations, creates opportunities and promotes personal development and progression
3. To proactively work with employers and other business partners to identify and meet their current and future needs
4. To be at the heart of the economic and social regeneration of Ramsbridge
5. To be efficient, cost effective and sustainable

Summary of applications via UCAS 1994-2011

Summary of applications via UCAS

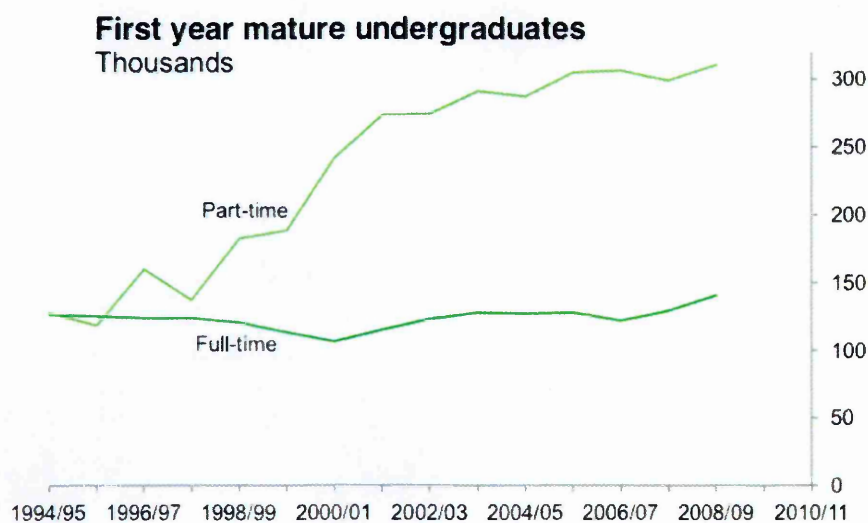
Thousands

	Applicants	Accepted applicants
1994	405	271
1995	419	291
1996	418	296
1997	459	336
1998	446	330
1999	443	335
2000	442	340
2001	454	358
2002	461	368
2003	476	374
2004	486	378
2005	522	405
2006	506	391
2007	534	413
2008	589	457
2009	640	482
2010	697	487
2011	700	492

Note: Figures not adjusted for the changes in the courses covered by UCAS

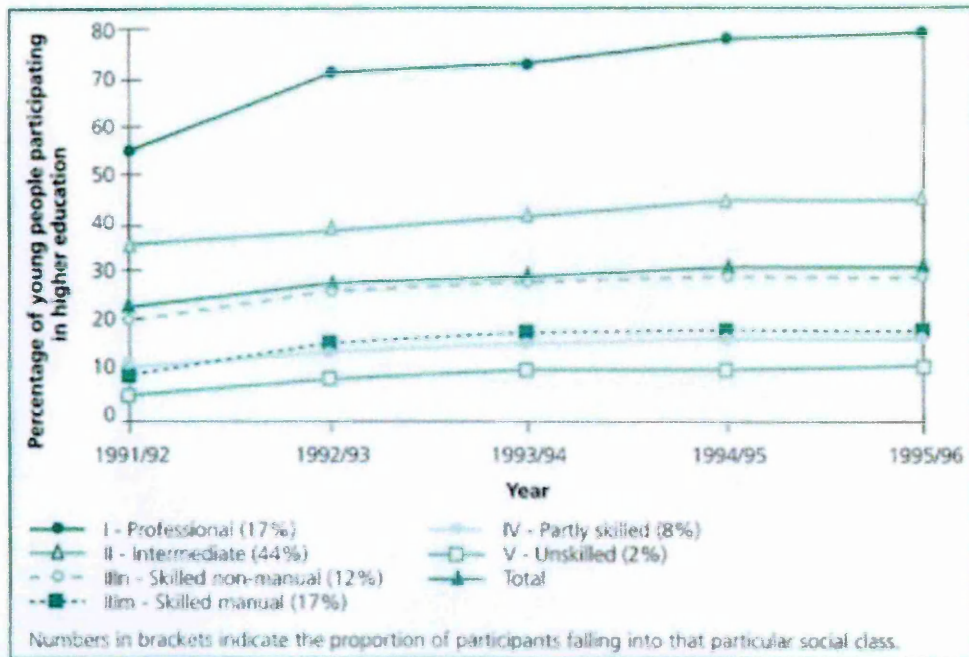
Sources: UCAS annual datasets; Final end of year figures for 2011, UCAS

First year mature undergraduates



(Bolton, 2012, p. 10.).

Percentage participation rates for Great Britain by socio- economic group



Source: DfEE

Notes:

- (1) The API is the number of young (aged <21) home domiciled initial entrants to courses of HE in FE and HE institutions across Great Britain, expressed as the proportion of the average 18 to 19 year old GB population. Initial entrants are those entering full-time & sandwich undergraduate courses of HE for the first time.
- (2) Acceptance data from the admissions agencies (UCCA, PCAS and UCAS) provided the distribution of initial entrants by social class.
- (3) The 1991 census provided the population distribution by social class - the same distribution is used for all years.

(Dearing Report 1997, p. 23)

Indices of deprivation – the separate domains of deprivation

The Indices of Deprivation (2010) measures deprivation using 38 indicators grouped into 7 distinct domains. Each domain of deprivation is measured separately through its component indicators. A Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) receives a score for each domain and is then ranked against other LSOAs to show comparative levels of deprivation. While each domain can be viewed alone, the domains are weighed and the scores for each LSOA are combined to create an overall Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The separate domains of deprivation are as follows:

Income deprivation (weighting 22.5%)

Employment deprivation (weighting 22.5%)

Health deprivation and disability (weighting 13.5%)

Education, skills and training deprivation (weighting 13.5%)

- Sub Domain – Children/young people
- Sub Domain – Skills

Barriers to housing and services (weighting 9.3%)

- Sub Domain – wider barriers
- Sub Domain – Geographical barriers

Crime (weighting 9.3%)

Living environment (weighting 9.3%)

- Sub Domain – the ‘indoors’ living environment
- Sub Domain – the ‘outdoors’ living environment

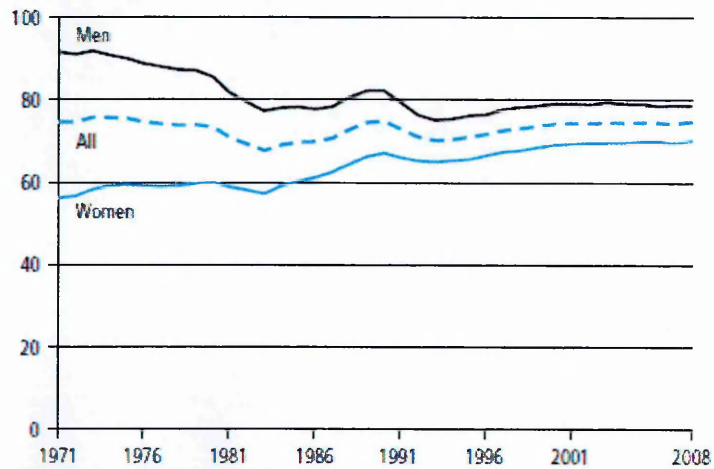
DCLG (2010)

<http://www.cumbriaobservatory.org.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/671/4674/4082715432.doc>

Employment rates: by sex**Employment rates:¹ by sex**

United Kingdom

Percentages



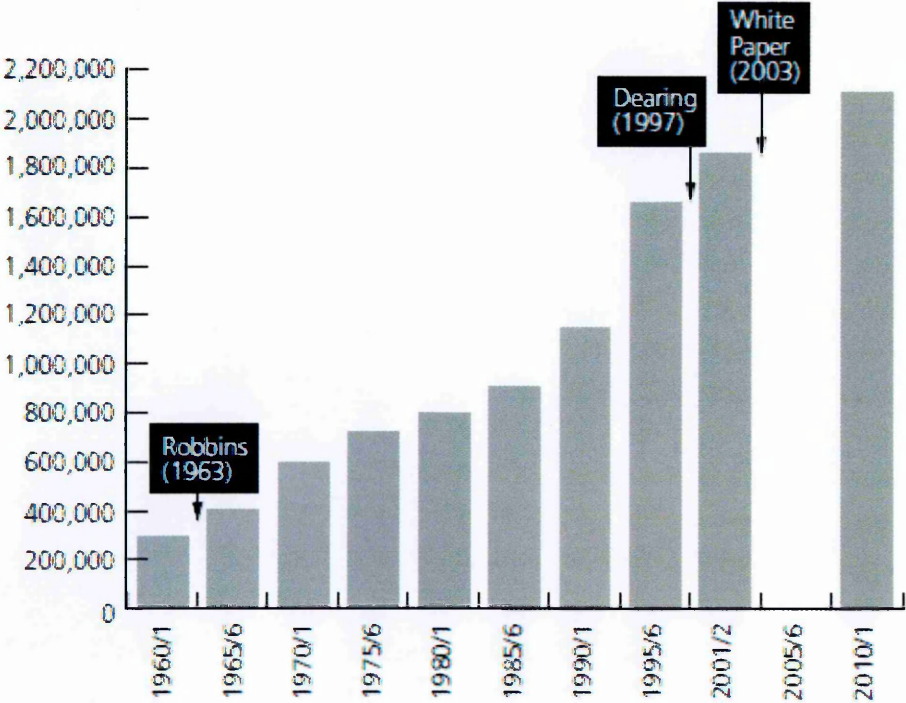
¹ Data are at Q2 each year and are seasonally adjusted. Men aged 16 to 64 and women aged 16 to 59. See Appendix, Part 4: Labour Force Survey.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

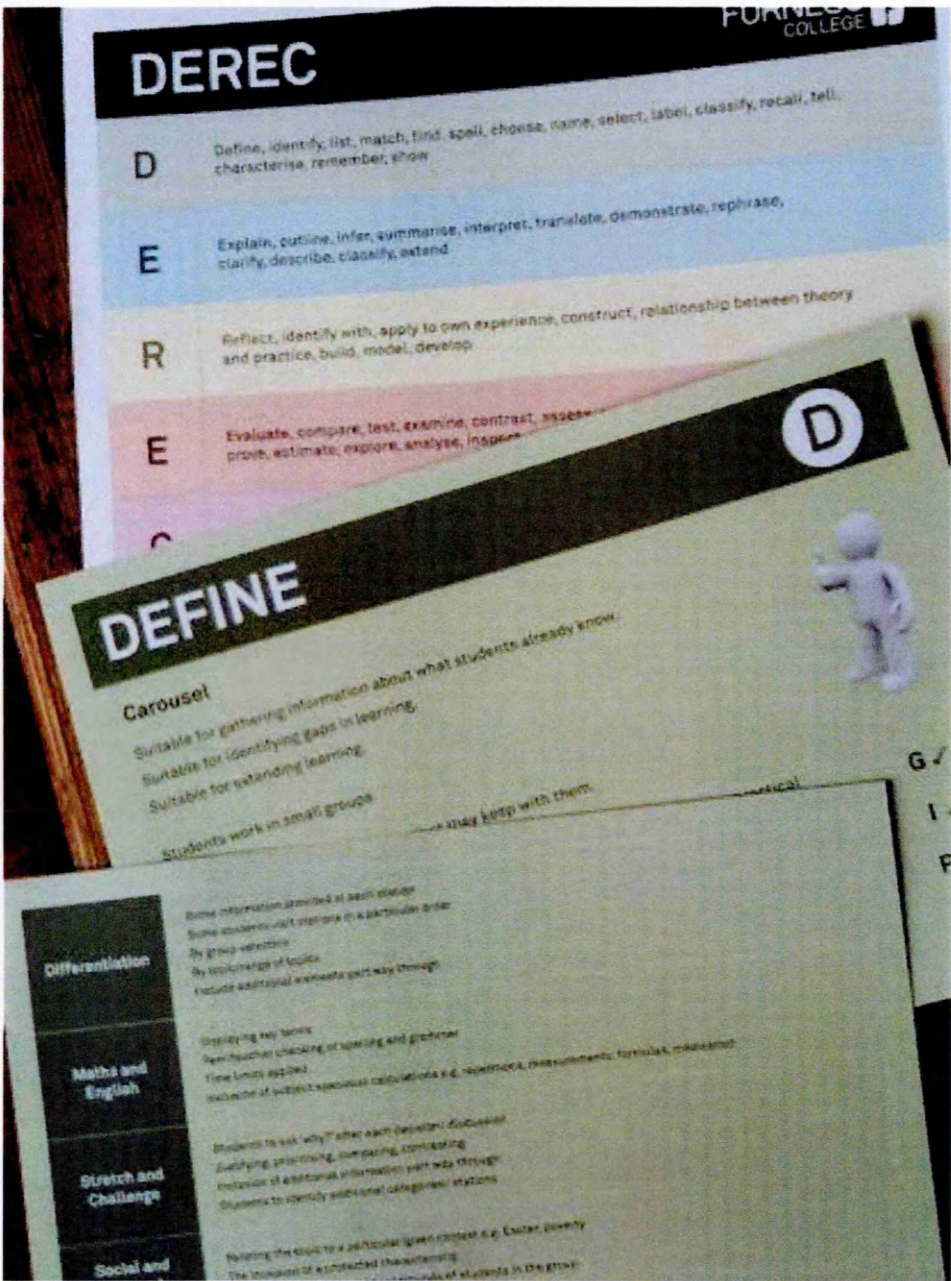
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/social-trends-rd/social-trends/social-trends-39/chapter-4.pdf>

accessed 14th August 2015

Mass Participation
Student numbers (not FTE) between 1960 and 2010
Shaping HE 50 years after Robbins, p. 36



DEREC – Teaching and learning tool



Megan Attwood (2015)

Developing self: a model of mature working class women studying on a foundation degree

Stage 7: developing self/transforming practice

Increasing levels of general self-esteem enables the women to transfer the knowledge and understanding gained during the foundation degree to support the transformation of learning in others



Stage 6: developing self/transitional transforming

Reflective practice linking personal to professional is more intuitive and study is more independent. The developing of skills and a sense of self provides the women with the confidence to amend and change their original goals. Some conflict and vulnerability remains within this stage but the women are more able to respond to it without abandoning their plans



Stage 5: tutor/peer dependent

Conflict and vulnerability is still evident within this stage. The women are dependent on the tutor for guidance and reassurance and the course peer group for emotional support. Reflective practice linking personal to professional is aberrant. The women find solace in the support network around them and are able to continue with study (course peer group, tutor, VLE, college university centre)



Stage 4: transitional/conflicting

Conflict and vulnerability is still evident in this stage. New conflict arises between the women and their family and/or friends/workplace as all adapt to the new situation (routine, thinking, roles, developing voice, developing self-esteem and confidence)



Stage 3: reflective/transitional

Conflict and vulnerability is still evident within this stage. The women reflect on their current situation and long term future. They make the decision to change it. This is predominately for the benefit of others (children and/or family)



Stage 2: child/family dependent

Conflict and vulnerability is still evident within this stage. The women have a keen interest in their child's schooling and development. Self-esteem through others in the form of nurturing and caring of children and family is evident. The women are dependent on their family's dependence on them



Stage 1: vulnerable/conflicting

Low self-esteem is experienced by the women (evidence of one or more of the following; bullying, academic failure, relationship break up, illness of self and/or family member, disability, lack of career guidance or confidence in ability, alcohol abuse, imprisonment of family member, death of family member, experience of a dominant parenting style or a patriarchal household when growing up).

Megan Attwood (2015)

Example of revised interview transcript

Beth interview 5

VN550056 24 minutes 47 seconds 27th March 2014

Meg	The first area I wanted to clarify with you from the last interview is about barriers to studying.	1 2 3
Beth	Erm...time is the biggest barrier to it, finding, erm, finding what I feel is quality time to do the work really, fitting it in round life (laughing) you realise just how little free time you have that you don't have to dedicate to other things.	4 5 6 7 8
Meg	Tell me about what would enable you to have more time?	9 10
Beth	Erm...pew, not working full time, not having two young children, so unrealistic, you can't, things that can't be changed...erm, I suppose there are things that could go, aspects of social life, and some free time but also realistically without that the mental effects of just being a mum and working and studying and that it would be immense.	11 12 13 14 15 16
Meg	If we can go back to what you have talked about before, how doing this level of study earlier in your life, would that have alleviated those barriers?	17 18 19
Beth	It would... erm... but I don't regret not doing it. I am actually talking a lot to a friend of mine who is doing something very similar erm... I do regret not doing it but I don't regret what I did instead if that makes sense, but yeh, when I look at, I get quite frustrated with young people who are studying and don't have time to do this and don't have time to do that where in reality I think, well actually you do, you have oodles more time than I do, but it is life events and state of mind isn't it? Everything happens, not necessarily for a reason, but as a consequence of what has gone before.	20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28
Meg	Even though you wouldn't have changed having your children, your work and everything, how do you view the fact that you didn't have those opportunities initially?	29 30 31 32
Beth	I think now I see it as slightly unfair, at the time it was just what it was. I think erm, the more I've thought about it now and I have thought about it quite a bit, it's the family pressures of nobody in my family having done it before, so it was never... it actually was to my parents when I talked to them later, but to me it wasn't an expectation, that's not what people like us did, you went out and got a job or you got a trade, you got into that market when actually in reality if I had done those extra years and those extra years at uni it would have made a massive difference to where I was now. But I do think it was a social restriction as much as anything else, I know for a fact that the ability was there but socially it wasn't necessary, it wasn't automatically assumed that that is what we would do.	33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44
Meg	The fact that you have studied this way and here, how do you view that?	45

Beth	Erm... no, I think this is a fantastic opportunity. It has given me especially now I am at this stage I'm looking at topping up, not topping up, what's going to happen after this, this was my only opportunity to study at this level. I could have done it at home through the Open University but realistically that wouldn't have happened because realistically that is even more time to find, at least this way I am released a day from work to come so I do have a certain number of hours, a few hours focused on this. That is what these Thursdays are about.	46 47 48 49 50 51 52 8 9 10
Meg	So would you have travelled away if you had been able to study when you were younger?	11 12 13
Beth	Yes, if I had gone to university at eighteen I would have definitely moved to a city to have done that and it would have been the full experience of it.	14 15 16
Meg	Government policy refers to people like us, as non-traditional, what are your views on that term?	17 18 19
Beth	It sounds very old fashioned really; I wouldn't have thought there were traditional students. I think when I was sixteen to eighteen I think things were perhaps just beginning to change a little bit, that there was more expectation, now I was the first one out of my family to even do A levels so that was a change for us so think maybe university was almost a step too far especially for my dad to have lost us at that age, but non-traditional... I have always been non-traditional, in everything I have ever done so that doesn't surprise me that I am continuing to be (laughs).	20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28
Meg	Policy identifies traditional students as young, white, middle-class, study in traditional universities...	29 30 31
Beth	I would say most... I would find it very difficult to call anybody traditional, I think the ethnicity and the gender mix, I suppose age wise there is less, I don't know, I would have the impression that there are fewer people of my age actually going to university away from home, but I think that, I assume that because of circumstances.	32 33 34 35 36 37
Meg	How does being referred to as non-traditional make you feel?	38 39
Beth	No I quite like it, (laughs) but that is me through and through. I have really thought about why I am doing this and have gone back to being realistic that I cannot go full way and do a PGCE because I cannot do it full time but actually when I originally started it wasn't to do anything it was just to prove to me that I could do this, so from that point of view it has been very successful, you know I have learnt a lot and I think that we could do, I couldn't, I can't even comprehend travelling to [city] to do the top up which is a day's journey but my time is so tight that the thought of having an extra two hours, three hours travelling a week is just, I am thinking I can't fit that in.	40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50
Meg	I was interested in when you were talking about how your practice has changed and how you work with the children you work with and how you	51 52

	have changed the classroom around. Would you tell me how that has come about?	1
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		3
Beth	I think, doing the course has given me confidence, I have always been, for years I have been treated as a teacher even though I am not qualified, that is how I am seen amongst my colleagues and many of the parents and the children but I think having an understanding of the theory behind the practice is giving me confidence to use some of that in, actually within school and this opportunity of education for the sake of education is what's inspired me to develop opportunities for children to learn just for the sake of learning. I do a lot of global learning, debates and encouraging children to almost be political, to form opinions and because I feel that is what helps them to express and to develop an interest in finding out more which is what learning is. I have the freedom to do that because one day a week I have a class through PPA cover and I am not having to hit curriculum targets, particularly. It impacts on everything they do, ability to work in teams, to empathise, to learn from each other and that is another thing that with my classroom, my horseshoe shape very much focuses us in several ways really, in that they are a group. The children are very aware that they are the lower ability and that is why we are together they have never been particularly told that but they know anyway, but to develop pride in ourselves as a unit and to learn from each other, to respect each other and it makes a very difficult class controllable and makes it functional really.	4
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Meg	How has how you have been taught on the foundation degree influenced how you teach the children?	25
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Beth	In a sense it is because I encourage them to think more. I think often the tendency is, especially children with lower ability or with specific learning needs is to instruct all the time and I try to help them, to sort of sow seeds for them to discover more and I think that has come as a direct, knowing I am an unconventional learner from my school days I think I have sort of fed that back to them that this is an alternative way to learn, yes there are certain things that I need to teach you but actually you discover more if you go and find out yourself .	28
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Meg	Do you feel that that is what has been emphasised on the foundation degree?	37
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Beth	Definitely, and I think that one advantage I had was that I got that very early on, from the very, very early on I understood what you were saying to us about this is a tit bit of stuff that these are the sorts of things you should be reading about and actually it is up to you whether you go and research them or not. And the more you read about these people you do begin get ideas there are some theorists that I do have some understanding of what they believed and how they fit together but I think that is only because I have put that, that basis has been there from very early on. Lots of things have, you know, I think of Bloom with that and it sounds very basic that you need to remember then understand then apply and analyse and it is just common sense but actually it isn't common sense to everybody, it does need to be and I think that aspect of it particularly this year when my abilities cross two curriculums levels within my nine children I have to be very aware of that child is not doing that, not because they don't want to do it but actually they	39
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	are incapable of understanding it because they can't remember how to add two numbers together and I think, and a lot of it I think you can take a bit from there and oh that makes sense and I guess that is how you're supposed to look at it it isn't it and that nobody has all the answers it just, but and Maslow, and Bronfenbrenner was one that really affected me with some of the children I work with, the impact, especially that relationship between school and home the massive impact either positively or negatively that it can have on that child.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Meg	Going back to Bloom, when you plan your sessions do you consciously think we need to get the understanding first before we move on to anything else?	10 11 12 13
Beth	I don't think I am thinking, this is Bloom, but it is almost embedded in my practice now and asking that question, do you understand? especially with numeracy, do you understand where all of these numbers have come from?, do you understand why I have twenty-five there? and actually, often children being asked that direct question will say no, no idea and you can take it back to show how you got that number because I think there are a lot of assumptions from adults of what, that is another big thing, addressing preconceptions and assumptions about what people know, you assume children of a certain age will know things, everyday they surprise you with something they don't.	14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24
Meg	When you teach the children what is the one skill you want them to develop?	25 26 27
Beth	Erm... I think to be able to, passion is not the right word, to be adventurers, to be able to explore really to be explorers to not accept what they are told but to use what they have been told and think whether they agree with it or not. I suppose it is just the thought process of being able to develop the skills to think yes or this person thinks that and this person thinks that so what do I actually think and that sense of personal self-esteem and belief that your thoughts it's not right or wrong, its valid, to have the confidence to express a valid point of view. For me that is what primary schools should be about, developing these children as thinkers and explorers and adventurers and that is part of my tribe's chant we are adventurers and our treasure's learning and this is how we get there.	28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39
Meg	How does what you have done with the children relate to you and your studying?	40 41 42
Beth	It makes me want to impart to them the value of education, for education's sake. I feel very strongly that I am educated all the time there are lots and lots of things I have learnt all of the time outside of formal education and I think my, and I often say to the children when they say oh I don't want to write this, I say oh, ok, I was up an hour, I've done an hour of writing before I've come to work today because if you leave it until you are my age this is how difficult it is going to be and to try and encourage them to love learning really.	43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50
Meg	Would it have made a difference if someone had said that to you?	51 52

Beth	I think I did have that to a degree at primary school because it was much less structured. At secondary school I would have loved someone to encourage me to believe that I could do it and I think perhaps that's what was missing. From that age when you are making your options, O levels through to sixth form, I never felt as if I should be there. From nowhere else other from inside me really, I was never quite good enough. Interestingly we are having a school reunion this year people have said who have got in touch, to me oh I remember you, you were really clever at school and I thought how interesting that was that I was perceived as this person but I did not think I was that person at all...and that is the thing that is what I try to do, find that thing within the children I come across whether it is being good at sport or technology, whatever their thing is to give them something, this is what you are good at and this is how you can develop it further.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
Meg	Did you think that communication, that telling someone is key to all of this?	16 17
Beth	Up to a point it needs to be positive reinforcement but also having the confidence and the relationship with people to be able to say this was great you've done this but this is what you need to do to make it better and this is very much about how we provide feedback here and being able to say to them you haven't got it at all but I can see why you haven't and this is what we need to work on. Not everyone can be good at everything but that does not make you a failure.	18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
Meg	I was interested in what you said last week about education being an escape.	26 27
Beth	I think a part of the aspect of this was it wasn't an escape when I started it; it was a challenge, a massive challenge...and I was absolutely terrified for the first few months but I think that the fact that it was for me and because remembering back to why I started, it was just for me, I could get a better job maybe although it wasn't guaranteed the fact that it was that something that was mine and mine alone really helped me to escape into it and the confidence that I got from studying and from being able to be who I am changed me in lots of different ways it changed everything about me it changed it changed the way I want to parent it changed the way I wanted to be in my relationship and lots of people would say that it was very sad that my relationship ended, not directly, but in a sense, the education and the fact that I was moving on did have a massive impact on that but I don't see that as a sad thing, it liberated me, education has liberated me in lots of ways and accepting me being who, not just who I am but who I want to be. This is who I am, I know I am not perfect, nobody is but I like who I really am. I think the balance has come back into my life I have taken control of everything in my life which makes the studying a little bit less special I think. I think this year I need, I have found this year very challenging, I am torn between de-motivation and panic at the moment because time is running out. I have got to the point where I am saying you either do it or you fail and it is as simple as that, and take the time out when it has finished to reflect and recharge batteries and come back to do the top up with the attitude I started with.	28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50
	END OF INTERVIEW	

Student individual session planner

FD CHYPS modules

Name _____ Date _____

This morning/afternoon I am working on _____

By the end of this session I will have completed _____

By the end of this session I might have completed _____

I feel confident about _____

I am unsure about _____

1 thing I need to remember this morning/afternoon is _____

I would like a tutorial _____

Employability skills developed during this session _____

Reflection on the progress I have made this session _____

1 thing I will do before the session next week is _____

1 thing I might do before the session next week is _____

1 thing I won't do before the session next week is _____

Megan Attwood (2015)

Ethical issues at seven research stages (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009)

Thematizing. The purpose of an interview study should, beyond the scientific value of the knowledge sought, also be considered with regard to improvement of the human situation investigated.

Design. Ethical issues of design involve obtaining the subjects' informed consent to participate in the study, securing confidentiality, and considering the possible consequences of the study for the subjects.

Interview situation. The personal consequences of the interview interaction for the subjects needs to be taken into account, such as stress during the interview and changes to self-understanding.

Transcription. The confidentiality of the interviewees needs to be protected and there is also the question of whether a transcribed text is loyal to the interviewee's oral statements.

Analysis. Ethical issues in analysis involve the question of how penetratingly the interviews can be analyzed and of whether the subjects should have a say in how their statements are interpreted.

Verification. It is the researcher's ethical responsibility to report knowledge that is as secured and verified as possible. This involves the issue of how critically an interviewee may be questioned.

Reporting. There is again the issue of confidentiality when reporting private interviews in public, and of the consequences of the published report for the interviewees and for the groups they belong to.

Example of initial essay plan using DEREK

Introduction - Set out what the essay is going to do

Define - Who is this group?

Definition of marginalised group in the general sense

Identify specific group looked after children

Napcc P 1834/1406? Ask back up with statistics

'69, 540 looked after children in foster care, Barnardos (DfE 2015) 11602

Explain why this group is marginalised

- endured life experiences different from the majority
- poor quality of care?
- Stereotyping?
- lack of knowledge and understanding by practitioners/public, gov?
- historical perspective
- possible factors that generate prejudice and inequality.

Create a plan what on a marginalised group

Changes or of children and young people

Could be made or should be made? What is the alternative and who needs to make them.

Government, practitioners, media, public?

Suggested changes to policy, propose new strategies, changes to society, training

Evaluate what is in place, what works/doesn't work, possible reasons why + impacts on child, practitioner, parent, assumptions being made

by abuse and health care team. Safeguarding vulnerable groups Act 2005 - The children leaving care Act 2000, young person Act 2008, children + family Act 2014 not always best place for child to be, cost, lack of resources? DfE 2015, practitioner not responsible, if maltreatment missed, "Team around the child" CAP

Reflex it on what is in place to address the issue of marginalisation for this group - policy, initiatives, strategies, training? What do I know about this already - We have 2 looked after children in the nursery, what do I still need to find out? What do we do, is there a plan behaviour of child, homeless, unhelped, frustrated, lonely, stay, among in care, omitted, more from one place to another no need, use PECT this time, work on conclusion

Coded feedback sheet

		i) do not begin a sentence with a quote m)
7	Reference page	a) Use the Harvard method, refer to your UCLan handbook for guidance b) Do not over reference

FD CHYPS - Coded Assignment Feedback Sheet

Specified assignment learning outcomes

1	Learning Outcomes	a) Refer to your assignment brief to ensure that all specified learning outcomes have been addressed b)
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Structure, organisation & presentation

2	Submission of work	a) Submit a UCLan Department of Social Work Assessment Feedback Sheet with each assignment b) Complete all specified information on all UCLan paperwork c) Include your UCLan G number in the assignment header d) Do not include your name on your assignment e) Maintain confidentiality at all times; do not include names or addresses of settings or of the people linked with them, no photographs where people or settings can be identified f)
3	Presentation of work	a) Include a header on all assignments including your G number, the module code and name and assignment number b) Include a footer with page numbers (X of Y) c) Font Arial, size 12 d) Double line space e) Do not staple your work together f) Do not place your work in separate plastic wallets g) Write in the format specified by UCLan, no bullet points within an essay h) Include the title of the assignment on the first page of the assignment i) Do not underline j)
4	Introduction	a) Write in the future tense b) Set out the intended topics to be discussed in a logical order c) Explain why you are setting out to do this d)
5	Conclusion	a) Write in the past tense b) Echo the introduction c) Look to the future, consider implications for future practice d) Do not introduce new topics e) Do not write "in conclusion..." f)

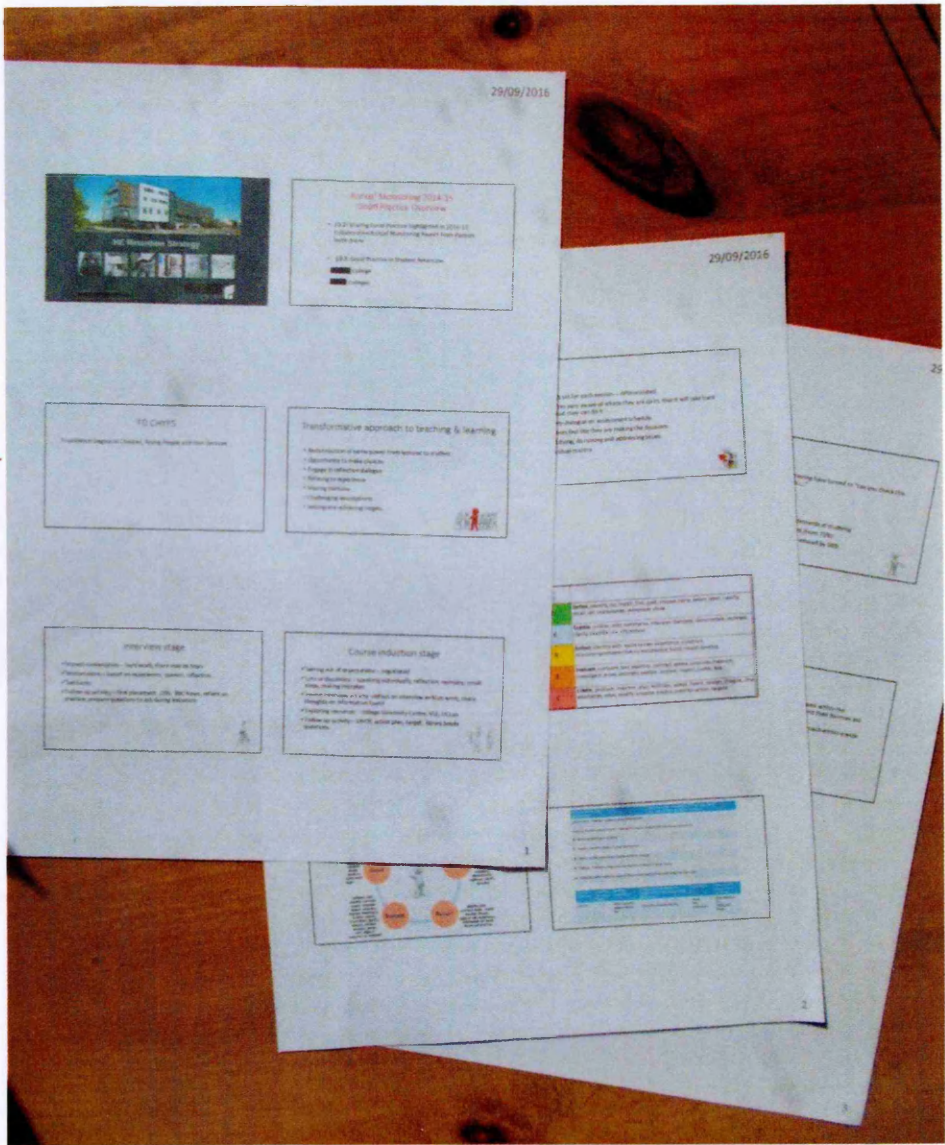
Use of sources (including referencing & bibliography)

6	Referencing within the text	a) Use the Harvard method; refer to your UCLan handbook for guidance b) Include author, year and page number in brackets c) Refer to author by surname only d) Reduce the length of some quotes by including key words or phrases only e) Place quotes carefully, lead in and out of quotes in order for your work to flow f) Do not over reference; no more than 10% of your word count for quotes g) Use speech marks if you are quoting direct speech or text within a source h) Use single speech marks i) Use double speech marks j) Use a more reliable source k) Only include a page number if using a direct quote
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Author: Meg Attwood

Megan Attwood (2011)

Sharing good practice session PPT



Megan Attwood (2016)

Example of tutor session plan using DEREK

Name of lecturer/LSA: Meg Attwood		Date/s of session: Wednesday 3 rd December 2014 Start and end time of session : 9:30-11:30			
Session topic: Tuckman's stages of group development					
Learning intentions/opportunities - During this session students will have the opportunity to:					
D Define key terms and concepts					
E Explain Tuckman's stages of group development					
R Reflect on past and present practice within the setting					
E Evaluate Tuckman's stages and own practice in relation to other theory					
C Create a point for action to improve future practice and add personal target to action plan.					
Intended timeframe	Learning intention DEREC	Learning opportunity	Student learning opportunity (differentiation, extension, stretch & challenge)	Assessment	Lecturer/LSA support & resources
15 mins	D	Define Tuckman's stages of group dev	If you have finished this then	How2 ... Peer assessment	Draw attention to... Clarify task Check....

Megan Attwood (2014